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Jeffrey Mark Guarino

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COMIX IN THE CLASSROOM:
A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR GRAPHIC NOVELS AND COMIC BOOKS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education:
Middle Grades Option


by
Jeffrey Mark Guarino
September 1998

COMIX IN THE CLASSROOM:
A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR GRAPHIC NOVELS AND COMIC BOOKS

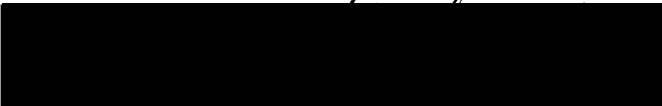
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Approved by:


Irvin Howard, First Reader

8/18/98
Date


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ABSTRACT

Comix in the Classroom: A Resource Guide for Graphic Novels and Comic Books is a guide for teachers and readers of comix alike, describing their use in the classroom and demonstrating their potential as a storytelling art form that is as powerful and moving as film, prose, poetry, or drama. This book is highlighted by a list of one-hundred graphic novels, anthologies, and literary comix suitable for the adolescent, with a summary and critique of each. This book also contains: language arts lesson plans to help teachers utilize comix in their classrooms; lesson ideas for non-language arts classes like math, science, art, social studies, and foreign languages; samples of actual literary comix novels; and an introduction for newcomers to a medium of storytelling almost completely overlooked by the academic and critical community in this country.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO COMIX IN THE CLASSROOM

There is something missing in our classrooms. This book is a small attempt to fill a gap in our public schools, demonstrating that there are graphic novels--or comic books--as literate and powerful and moving as anything studied in the mediums of prose or film or drama or poetry. This book is primarily directed towards language arts curriculums and teachers of literature, but there are also sections devoted to the teaching of comix in non-language arts curriculums as well.

"Comic books" are generally avoided in the classroom, unless they are offered as easy-to-read alternative adaptations of already existing works of literature, as with Classics Illustrated. Public awareness of comix as a literary storytelling medium is virtually nil, and anyone picking up this book will no doubt be surprised at the number of "comic books" that aren't accurately described by the term. Indeed, the term itself denotes humor and denies the medium potential seriousness or dignity. However, there are many comix that step outside the generally held idea of what the artform has to offer, and it is the goal of this book to introduce the reader to them.

Over two hundred graphic novels, four-thousand "comic books," and two dozen comix reference books were reread, reviewed, and studied in preparation for this book, and many

of the techniques and comix discussed in this book have been used in the classroom by myself and consulting teachers.

RATIONALE FOR PROGRAM

There are many reasons why an implementation of comix study in the classroom is needed, especially within the language arts curriculums.

If the goals of the language arts frameworks include increasing reading skills, introducing new vocabulary, and exposing students to stories and writing that are rich in relevant themes, then teachers are missing the boat in leaving out an entire artform in their classrooms. If prose stories and novels and plays and poetry are all studied as part of the "language arts," then why not introduce a medium of storytelling that many young adults either already appreciate or, if they've never read comix before, would be excited to explore. Out of all the artforms studied in our public schools, it could easily be argued that comix is one of the few that is genuinely American. Comix, as a novelistic medium of storytelling, are native to American culture, along with jazz and a very few others. It is also, interestingly, a very ethnic art form, and many of its great masters are first- and second-generation immigrants. One will find that the great comix novels produced in the 1950's and '60's are the product of Jewish-Americans and Italian-Americans, etc., while many of the best works being created today are from Latinos and Asian-Americans. Connections to an ever-

broadening ethnic base in our schools can be made.

It also seems that comix are on the cusp of mainstream American awareness. The reader of this book will no doubt have heard the rallying cry of "comics aren't just for kids anymore," and, while that isn't entirely true, there does seem to be a slow but steady increase in knowledge that comix aren't just superheroes and funny four-panel gags in newspapers. Now is as good a time as any to push that awareness. And while there have been a few good books reviewing and discussing literate comix, there haven't been nearly enough to catch the waxing public interest.

Comix is a new artform. "Graphic novels" telling longer, more thematically complex and powerful stories have only been around thirty or forty years. Like film in the early fifties, comix is relatively virgin soil, and every year new works are created using comix language in inventive new ways never seen before. What an exciting time to teach this medium! Imagine bringing Mark Twain's newest book, Huckleberry Finn, into the classroom mere years after it was written, and possibly introducing the author to students to ask questions and better understand his ideas. This can be done in comix. Many comix creators would be happy to know their books are being read in the public schools, and many universities already offer classes studying the medium as part of their curriculum. It's time that secondary schools and middle schools follow suit.

Reading is not as popular as it was fifty or a hundred years ago. With the advent of television, movies and video

games, the purely visual storytelling mediums have attained the popularity and position of leisure time recreation that prose novels and short stories held a century ago. Lower and lower reading scores and the increase in illiteracy in this country reflect the waning in popularity of reading as a pastime.

The medium of comix is more accessible than prose. For immigrants and the children of immigrants new to this country, comix, comprised of words and pictures used in tandem are a bridge between the more popular (and less difficult to understand) artforms of television and film, that are purely visual, and prose, which are purely written. The artform of comix, if studied as a literate storytelling medium, can serve as a springboard to purely written works, and, more importantly, the accessibility of comix will draw students into a learning of language that they otherwise often shun or do everything to avoid.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR PROGRAM

There are a number of goals and objectives for this program:

- Goal 1: To expose students to a new medium of art.
- Objective 1: To present a library resource list of comix novels for both teachers and librarians.
- Title: 100 Graphic Novels for Young Adults
- Strategy: After program plan is read...To form a

reading committee devoted to the
review and discussion of new comix works

Goal 2: To teach comix within the language arts
curriculum.

Objective 1: To create lesson plans and suggest teaching
strategies for middle school and high school
teachers.

Title: Lesson Plans

Strategy: After program is read...To implement teaching
methods and tools to bring comix into the
language arts classes and other curricula.

Goal 3: To offer a resource guide to purchase comix.

Objective 1: To give a list of distributors, comix shops,
catalogs, etc., for the purchase of comix.

Title: Resource Guide

Strategy: After program is read...to purchase comix.

LIMITATIONS, DELIMITATIONS, AND ASSUMPTIONS

There are, of course, some design flaws, limitations,
and assumptions contained within this book and this program:

- Teachers must seek approval from their Board for new comix
works, which are easier to dismiss or "surface-scrutinize"
because of their visual nature.

- Schools must purchase comix works and graphic novels, which are often much more expensive than paperback novels or even hardback books.

- Time constraints already in place for curriculums overcrowded with material to be covered during the time-span of a class may be too stringent to allow for yet another unit to be studied.

- Many people still hold in their minds the faulty opinion that comix are childish or completely lacking in literary merit, which may hold back:

- teacher support at site
- administration support at site
- parent support at site
- district and Board support
- and even
- student support

There are many approaches that could be taken with a book about comix and literary graphic novels. I've chosen to approach this book as a guide to literary works done within the medium of comix, to offer a sampling of books and short stories that can be used easily in a classroom setting, either as supplementary reading or as part of a teachable unit of study. I've included, as a substantial portion of this book, a resource guide primarily as a way of showing teachers unfamiliar with literary comix a wide variety of

storytelling styles, themes, and subject matter explored within the confines of this new and exciting artform. In choosing those books, I've stayed away from anything that may cause hesitancy in bringing these works into a classroom, such as nudity or undue harsh language or violence. I've also kept to strict "sequential storytelling" as opposed to illustrated novels or children's books.

Some assumptions made with this book are:

- The Board in school districts will look at new comix works submitted without preconceived bias.
- Funds will be allocated for the purchase of graphic novels.
- Interested teachers and supportive librarians will make use of this resource book and lesson plan guides.
- Teachers will allow themselves the elbow room to experiment with a form of art that many students already know and love.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Adaptation: A work based upon another work done in another medium; for example, a comix short story based on a play.
2. Anime: Japanese animation or cartoons.
3. Anthropomorphism: Giving human characteristics to animals

or non-human things.

4. Caption: The box in a comix panel containing narration.

5. Cartooning: An alternate term for the craft of comix.

6. Cinematic Technique: Techniques and narrative devices/tools employed in comix storytelling that are similar to those used in film.

6. Comic Book: The more conventional term for comix, but usually implying works of lighter, less serious, less literary intent.

7. Comic Strip: The term usually used to describe very short works of four to twelve panels written and drawn for newspapers and magazines.

8. Comix [plural or singular]: The alternate term coined by Art Spiegelman and others to describe comic books with a more adult or literary slant. [Also, "commix"].

9. Comix Medium: The craft of storytelling utilizing both words and pictures in sequence.

10. Comix Narrative: The form and structure of storytelling with words and pictures arranged in sequence.

11. Comix Novel: The term usually applied to comix stories of length, usually at least two-hundred pages.

12. Comix Novella: A shorter comix work, longer than thirty or forty pages, but less than one- or two-hundred.

13. Comix Series: A set of stories usually published in slim, stapled pamphlet form and continued month-to-month, serialized in the way that television shows are serialized, with consistent characters, themes, etc.

14. Comix Short Story: A short comix work, usually two to forty pages or so.

15. Compilation: A book that has collected a number of stories or chapters of a single novel-length story from a comix series.

16. Format: The actual published presentation of a comix work; size, dimensions, color or black-and-white, etc.

17. Genre: The style or type of story told in the comix medium, holding to certain conventions or formula. Note: comix is not a genre, but a medium.

18. Golden Age: The time period roughly spanning the late 1930's to the late 1950's, in which a wide variety of genres, formats, and stories was represented within the comix medium.

19. Graphic Novel: The most accepted current term for longer comix stories that possess a more literary tone.

20. Graphics: The illustrations or picture portion of a comix story.

21. Gutter: The area between the panels of a comix story in which information is filled in by the reader's imagination.

22. Linework: The style or method of drawing the pictures portion of a comix story.

23. Manga: Japanese comix, which hold a much higher place in Asian culture and art than comix do in this country.

24. Metafiction: A type of fiction in which the rules of narrative are openly discussed and explored, and one in which the characters themselves often become aware of the fictional world they find themselves in.

25. Metahuman: A more palatable euphemism for "superhero."

26. Minimalism: The style of drawing (and writing, really) in which detail is discarded in favor of simplicity of form and the communication of ideas.

27. Ongoing Series: A comix series that is unending. Many comix series with more popular characters (Like Batman, etc.)

have been consistently published for fifty years or more.

28. Origin Story: A comix story, usually done with superheroes, in which the onset of the character's life (at least as it pertains to the genre stories told about the character) is revealed.

29. Pacing: The use of timing and panel-transitions which slow or speed up the flow of a readers interpretation of time within a comix story.

30. Panel: The individual box or single illustration which serves as a moment of "frozen time" and is used in sequence with other panels to tell a comix story.

31. Panel-To-Panel Transition: The more ethereal technique of comix storytelling in which time or events move forward from individual illustration to individual illustration within a comix story, revealing much, but leaving as much unsaid "between" the panels themselves.

32. Pictorial Narrative: A wordless story told in comix without the use of narration or dialogue, utilizing only visual information to reveal the plot.

33. Scratchboard: An art technique in which white lines are "scratched" onto a black "canvas" to inverse the effects of conventional drawing and the impact of light and shadow on a

page.

34. Sequential Art: The term coined by Will Eisner describing comix [Also: Sequential Storytelling].

35. Silver Age: The time period roughly spanning the late 1950's to the late 1960's, in which genres were expanded and experimented with, and a general emergence of great creativity was experienced within the comix medium.

36. Trade Paperback: A softcover compilation of stories or chapters from a comix series.

37. Word Balloon: The drawn bubble within which is contained the dialogue of a character in a comix story [also: Dialogue Balloons].

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Forget everything you know about comics.

Forget the Sunday Funnies, with such classical examples of American strip art as Hal Foster's beautifully rendered adventures of Tarzan and Prince Valiant; forget also Carl Barks' innocent and playful commentary on family and economics in his early Uncle Scrooge stories; forget George Herriman's wonderfully Dadaesque Krazy Kat; forget Walt Kelly's subtle satire and brilliant examination of American principles in Pogo; forget Charles Schultz's insightful and razor-sharp examination of childhood in Peanuts.

Forget those flimsy, stapled pamphlets called comic books that you might have picked up at the local five-and-dime or at that liquor store your father frequented. Forget Superman and Batman and Spiderman and the Incredible Hulk, with their (unintentionally?) powerful stories that brought to us mythic and iconic figures as indelibly memorable as anything the Greeks have offered from the dim past.

Forget Classics Illustrated, with their well-meaning but misguided attempt to transform such far-ranging classics as Moby Dick and Tale of Two Cities into compact, thirty-two page "epics" supposedly suitable for adolescent mental digestion.

Comix have always been of a part of pop-culture, and, as such, have enjoyed at least mediocre recognition as far as

storytelling mediums are concerned, but have also (again, because of their perception as part of pop-culture, perhaps) consistently been debased as a "throw-away" craft most of the time. Teachers in the classroom, especially at the elementary and secondary levels, have traditionally held up comix as an example of what is not literate, what is not good, what is not desirable. Some have judged the entire medium as one having merely supplementary, little or no value. As harsh as it may sound, the majority of the academic community has convinced itself long ago that comix are often an intrusion on education, basically a stumbling block to literacy, and, at best, a general nuisance in the classroom tolerated only in hopes that they will provide a stepping stone to "real" literature at some point.

No one is really at fault for this. The medium itself (or, more accurately, the industry that has supported the medium) has done far more damage than any short-sighted librarian, would-be censor, or ignorant parent ever could, and some concessions must be briefly made.

The numerous comix publishers of the last five or six decades have, almost without fail, catered to the notion that comix is inherently a children's medium and, therefore, most of the fare that's been offered up has catered to childish tastes. So comix, in the last half-century or so, have been mainly marketed to a target audience of adolescents and preadolescents. While these two facts do not by their very nature constitute a terrible thing, they have fostered within the reading public at large the mistaken idea that comix are,

somehow, only capable of more puerile content. Those few companies that have published comix with an adult audience in mind have often simply offered an increase in violent or sexual themes, and, to many people, comix "for adults" have often automatically implied some kind of pornography or other deplorable "low-brow" entertainment. Therefore, strangely, there seems to be an implicit understanding in this culture (the birthplace of the comix medium itself) that there are no "in-between" genres suitable for all ages, while still capable of exploring meaningful themes and significant subject matter.

The actual range of material available, however, in terms of maturity of theme and complexity of subject matter, is greater than most teachers are aware, and this should be kept in mind. Some works are ideally suited for a younger audience (children in the later years of elementary school). Some works are more appropriate for young teens in middle schools. Some, because of thematic depth or advanced narrative techniques, may be more readily accepted and understood by an older high school age student.

Since the medium has been all but ignored by both the critical and academic communities, and rarely taught in a formal setting, the exact methods of teaching it are relatively unknown and untried. New ground needs to be broken.

Additionally, there are obvious practical obstacles to overcome if the medium is to be taught. There is no "official" canon of comix literature, for example. Comix

works are generally more expensive than prose works because of printing costs. And the good comix works available are usually difficult to track down because of the proliferation of mediocre genre stuff that dominates the market.

These are all examples of some obstacles that are not insurmountable, however, and the drawbacks are far outweighed by the rewards of teaching this new and exciting medium of art.

Why should the medium be taught, however? Why can it not simply be appreciated by those who know of it and let our students be concerned with the curriculums of study that already exist for them? The inclusion of some comix works automatically necessitates the exclusion of some other works currently in the curriculums. There are at least two good reasons for the inclusion of comix that need to be considered in brief.

First, we are fast becoming an illiterate society. Our children do not enjoy reading. They do not find it pleasurable or entertaining. They do not feel as if literature belongs to them. This batch of rather depressing facts effects their whole education, learning being largely based in reading. But many children and young adults enjoy comic books. The melding of the written word with visuals is perfect for today's "post-literate" world. Since the advent of television, our young adults have become a very visually oriented group of people, and it seems to me that the comic book medium may allow our students to enjoy "the best of both worlds" in the arts, the written and the visual.

Second, comix are one of the few art forms native to American culture. They were born here in the United States almost a hundred years ago, and they have already achieved critical validity and academic acceptance in Japan and European countries while being vastly ignored in their native land. It is time for American culture to catch up with the rest of the world and show an appreciation for a medium that it created in the first place.

How should comic books be taught?

As mentioned earlier, new ground must be broken. However, a number of approaches comes to mind. A language arts teacher could, at the very least, incorporate a few works (or even just one) into her mainstream English course as part of a study of narrative, along with the other narrative studies already part of most language arts curriculums such as drama, poetry, prose, etc. She could, at the middle or high school level, team teach with an art instructor in order to understand better the visual aspects of the form. Admittedly, it's easier to focus more on comix as a storytelling medium and spend much of the time discussing how comix can be used in the language arts framework, alongside other great works of literature done in novels, short stories, plays, film, etc.

However, other non-English teachers could incorporate various critically acclaimed comix works into their own curriculums as a supplementary part of study. For example, there are some wonderful comix works that explain the scientific fields of genetics and environmentalism. There are

great comix pertaining to mathematics and statistics. There are comix explaining computers and computer programming. There are other comix that relate incredibly well-researched and insightful history, both of our nation and our world.

The territory is mostly unexplored and waiting to be exploited by innovative, daring administrators and teachers who realize that education in this country must change with the needs of its youth if it hopes to cope with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

If any message is delivered in this brief review, it's that comix is a wildly new, exciting artform filled with potential as yet unexplored. The few comix works that teachers may have been exposed to do not, in any way, come close to demonstrating the incredible range that comix as a medium possesses. Donald Phelps suggests this indirectly in his article published a few years back in The Comics Journal, a magazine devoted exclusively to the comix medium:

I'm often moved to speculate that the comic strip and comic book in America represent not a "form," but an inchoate torrent of potential forms, a scuffling, scrambling series of artistic negotiations.

(Phelps, 24)

Having already hinted at the potentially limitless diversity of subject matter that comix can delve into, this quote from Mr. Phelps suggests the complexity of this storytelling medium as a structured narrative. Robert Crumb, a major player in the maturation of comix since the sixties, has been known to say that comics are just lines on a page, but they're also much more than that. The juxtaposition of words and pictures, the jarringly subtle interplay of visual storytelling and narration and dialogue, the deceptive simplicity of sequential storytelling (panel-to-panel sequencing of plot, with as much being left unsaid between the panels as blatantly shown within them), the simple and divine potential to effect the mind of the reader is incredible. Why, then, is an entire medium of this richness being ignored? If film and prose and poetry and drama and music and philosophy and ethics and painting and sculpture and all the rest have a place somewhere, at whatever level, in our classrooms, why is there one form of art that is absent? To answer that question, it is in part because of the comparative youth of the medium. Comix are an inventive and often wildly experimental art form, partly because they haven't been around that long. But would it not have been exciting to introduce students to the works of Mark Twain or Poe or Kafka at the time they were writing them (and, even more importantly, weren't they)? Would it not be interesting to both teachers and students alike to witness the birth (or at least the adolescence) of an entirely new medium of art? Mr. Alan Moore, a comix creator at the forefront of the avant

garde, puts it this way:

For the past forty or fifty years, comi[x] have muddled through their infancy at a slow and sedentary pace. So slow, in fact, that it seemed as if it would last forever. Though the infant would frequently show signs of early promise, if not indeed genius, its physical progress never seemed to get beyond the crawling stage. This deceptive sluggishness often tended to mask the slow and occasionally painful process of maturation that the poor tyke was going through. Those of us in charge of minding the baby were so resigned to its eternal and unchanging state of mewling immaturity that even when the first bumps, swellings, sproutings, and secretions began to make their presence felt, we remained oblivious to what was actually going on. Then, one day, all of a sudden-- Bang! It's Puberty! Since then, comics have been changing so fast that

we scarcely recognize the
snub-nosed toddler that we used
to call 'Freckles.'

(Moore, introduction)

Comix are young as a medium goes. Words and pictures were first put together to tell a story of length less than a century ago. And this juxtaposition of words and pictures was first created right here in America. As mentioned before, comix (along with jazz and a very few others) is one of the few forms of art native to American culture. Even the term "comix" originated here, as an attempt to distance some works from the inherent implication of the "comical", "humorous", or "lighthearted" embedded in the term "comics" or "comic books". Art Spiegelman, along with a few debatable others, also coined the term to suggest a "co-mix" of words and pictures that is unique unto itself (different, say, from illustrated text pieces), and also to employ an early effort to separate works of real maturity from most of the drek that proliferates "comic books."

Believe it or not, literary and artistic works of real aesthetic and educational value have been done within the confines of sequential narrative art (or, please, let's stay with "comix" for those of us who do not like the fancier labels). There exist many, many stories done within the confines of the comix medium that are moving, telling, and poignant, and are worthy of our attention and study. These

works range from simple, innocent fairy tales to stories of adolescent angst to powerful dramas as moving as anything done in the classics of prose, film, or stage.

Some comix are more ideally suited to non-arts curriculums, such as science or math. These comix works, while by no means capable of replacing actual textbooks related to their subject matter, can nonetheless supplement study in marvelous ways. After all, the melding of words and pictures has already been proven to augment learning and increase comprehension, as any illustration-heavy texts used in the middle and high schools will aptly demonstrate. And comix, in the hands of a competent craftsman, blend text and pictures together in such a flawless manner that understanding even such complex topics as genetics or statistics becomes less a task and more a fundamentally enjoyable endeavor. Even the U.S. military figured this out some time ago, utilizing simple comic books to help teach risky skills such as gun-cleaning, ammo-reloading, etc.

It's difficult to discuss the impact comix could have on students and their learning, whether the subject is reading scores or critical thinking skills or anything else. Little implementation of comix works in the class has been tried, and even the notion of examining comix with anything resembling a critical eye is new, as observed by Joseph Witek in one of the few genuinely critical books about comix, Comic Books as History:

[T]here has been as yet little formal critical response to a growing body of work in the comic-book form which presents itself with no apologies as adult literature while at the same time maintaining its links to established comic-book genres and themes. The works of Harvey Pekar, Art Spiegelman, and Jack Jackson [and others], while they owe and acknowledge their debts to the great comic-book craftsmen of the past, confront issues such as the relations of historical and fictional discourse and the connections between ideology and narrative on a scale unprecedented in the history of sequential art.

(Witek, 10)

And yet works like those mentioned above, works of sublime achievement in storytelling and craft, go almost completely ignored. Comix are, in simple vulgar terms, the ugly step-daughter child of the arts. They are seen as "funny books," or, at best, "picture books" considered to be more or

less bastard prose with illustrations. But they are more. They are comprised of a unique form that can accomplish what neither words nor pictures could alone, and, indeed, they become something entirely new when crafted by a master's hand. Witek also observes:

Sequential art is not the only medium to use words and pictures, of course, but analogies with other media can obscure as much as they reveal about comics. The shifting viewpoints of the panels resemble cuts in the cinema, but unlike the moviegoer, the comic-book reader can partially anticipate and control the pace and order of the changes. Verbal captions and dialogue help [comix] to approximate the linear movement of [a] prose passage, but the combination of words and pictures demands a different order of perception from that required by a page of prose. Comic panels at first resemble illustrated texts or captioned pictures, but the relation of the two

elements is much more intimate and problematical in comics than in a news photograph or a novel with pictures. The synthesis of words and pictures in comic books finally becomes a narrative gestalt combining verbal movement and sequence with pictorial stasis and simultaneity, and vice versa. The elements of sequential art are separable for our analytic convenience, but they are kept apart only at the cost of the visceral power and expressive range of the medium.

(Witek, 34)

Those comix creators engaged in more serious work within the medium have grown tired of the perception that comix is a "stepping stone" to "real" books. A child or young adult's interest in literary comix is directly proportionate to that same child or young adult's interest in any learning or worthwhile, substantial art. Witek observes that Classics Illustrated, that bulwark of acceptability among the otherwise disparaged comic book industry for decades, went relatively unread by young readers in comparison with comix that were better crafted, more original, more heartfelt, and

more personal, regardless of the genre or subject matter, partly explaining the consistently greater sales of war comix, romance comix, humor comix, etc.

[I]f children did not choose to read classic literature. . . in book form, they were likewise unlikely to embrace edification simply because it came equipped with panels and dialogue balloons. The Classics Illustrated comics therefore required the goodwill and support of an adult audience, not as readers, but as intermediate purchasers.

(Witek, 35)

When readers peruse the contents of this book, they will quickly notice that a substantial number of pages is devoted to the summary and critique of one-hundred graphic novels. Readers will also notice, upon closer inspection, the dearth of familiar-sounding titles, perhaps erroneously anticipating a selection of adapted classics from prose. With the exception of Paul Auster's City of Glass, which was simply too well-crafted a comix work not to include [see 100 Graphic Novels for Young Adults in Chapter Three], all of the suggested readings are completely original works, done by

artists who have a love, a skill, and a passion for telling stories through comix. It is vitally important that teachers and new readers of comix be given a taste for the versatility that exists within the medium already. It is of paramount concern to this writer that, above and beyond everything else, teachers and other newcomers to the art form become acquainted with comix works that they, in all likelihood, never imagined existed.

One further concession, however: the "graphic novel," for all its pretensions as a term, is a relatively accurate name for a phenomenon in the comix industry that is also relatively new. For decades, artists laboring in the camps of the comic book industry were forced to see their work published in serialized form, the familiar stapled-pamphlet format being the only one available if those artists wanted any kind of audience for their work. Things were much the same for Charles Dickens and his contemporaries, whose novels were serialized chapter by chapter over a century ago. But with the advent of the "graphic novel," even the very nature of the types of stories being told in comix form changed.

Creatively speaking, the expanded scope of the graphic novel opens up all sorts of possibilities. It can allow for greater character development, more complex plots, more detailed scene-

setting and the generation
of mood. Qualitatively,
therefore, the form can
have properties that a
regular comic lacks, and
the skills required to
produce one are subtly but
distinctively different.

(Sabin, 236)

Whatever the cause--the change in publishing formats,
the whims of inventive creators, or cosmic intervention--
comix are coming into their own. There are graphic novels and
comix stories every bit as powerful and communicative and
telling about the human condition as any story told in any
other medium. And although there hasn't been much written on
the subject, either in relation to the classroom or art in
general, it can be safely assumed that this work will not be
the last.

CHAPTER THREE

LANGUAGE ARTS AND COMIX

There is no doubt that comix, by and large, are most appropriately studied within the confines of language arts courses. Along with plays, film, prose, and poetry, comix are best studied as a form of storytelling and language, and are a natural extension and amalgamation of both the visual and the narrative arts. Although comix are also able to be utilized within non-language arts class curriculums [see end of this chapter] the vast majority of works discussed and reviewed in this book are most suitable as a part of a study of narrative.

What follows in this chapter is a variety of lesson plans, vocabulary terms, and essay questions related to Maus by Art Spiegelman. Maus was chosen because of its suitability to a wide range of grades and ability levels in language arts classes, but the material presented here, especially the lesson plans, can easily be altered and augmented to accommodate any number of different graphic novels and comix described in this book [see One Hundred Graphic Novels for Young Adults at the end of this chapter].

A teacher utilizing comix in the language arts classroom can include them simply as part of a class library for free reading; offer them as extra credit assignments; read appropriate works as part of cross-curricular work; or read them as part of an actual unit of study, either incorporating

them into prose reading as part of a thematic unit, or studying them with other comix as part of a comix unit.

MAUS LESSON PLANS

LESSON ONE: The Differing Narrative Structures of Comix and Prose

GUIDING QUESTION: How are comix and prose similar and different?

SUBJECT AREAS: Language Arts

GROUPING: Individual, student pairs, and whole class instruction

MATERIALS: Student journals, notebooks, paper, pens

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY LEVEL: Comprehension, application

PRODUCTS AND OUTCOMES: Transference of pictorial imagery and sequential storytelling into prose

TIME FRAME: 3-4 class periods

PROCEDURE:

1. Students will read and review a chapter of Maus assigned to them [see Appendix I for a reproduction of chapter one].
2. Students will choose a portion of their chapter that reflects a point of interest for them; a dramatic or decisive moment or important scene that captures their imagination.
3. Students will brainstorm in prose form the main events of the scene they've chosen, relating the most significant actions of the characters and highlighting key sequences of dialogue and/or narration.
4. Students will organize their brainstorming ideas into an outline, evaluating which events would translate best into prose form and ordering all actions of characters, etc., chronologically.
5. Students will write a rough draft of a short prose story, adapting the events of their chosen scene from Maus into conventional narration, dialogue, etc., utilizing correct grammar, paragraph structure, punctuation, and spelling.
6. Students will work in pairs to group edit, proofread, and correct rough drafts in class.
7. Students will write a final draft of their story segment at home.

8. Students will read aloud their prose passages while remainder of class follows along in their Maus books, comparing the two mediums and their different effects, then engage in a class discussion of the similarities and differences between the two.

EVALUATION: Students will compose and write a creative story adaptation of an important scene from the graphic novel Maus.

LESSON TWO: The In-Between Story

GUIDING QUESTION: How important is the "unseen" portion of a comix story filled in by the reader's imagination?

SUBJECT AREAS: Language arts

GROUPING: Whole class, small group instruction

MATERIALS: 8 1/2 x 11 paper, pencils, pens, coloring utensils

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY LEVEL: Evaluation, synthesis

PRODUCTS AND OUTCOMES: A comix story based upon a scene from Maus, filling in the "gaps" between the panel borders of comix stories.

TIME FRAME: 3-4 class periods

PROCEDURE:

1. Students will read chapter three, "Blood in the Gutter," of Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics, pages 60-86 [see appendix II].
2. Students will engage in a whole class discussion on the

relevant points from McCloud's dissertation about the "unseen" aspects in comix, or the unrevealed parts of a story that occur in between panels on a page.

3. Students will work in small groups, choosing a scene of their choice from Maus at least five pages in length.

4a. Students will then work together in reconstructing the scene of their choice in comix form, delegating the different tasks of: writing and lettering; layouts and penciling; inking and coloring.

4b. Students will, in essence, recreate the scene that they've chosen from Maus, but will not be allowed to recount any exact visual, narration, or dialogue from Art Spiegelman's story. Rather, they will "fill in the gaps" of the story by retelling it, using their imaginations to conjure and create the same story, but telling what happens in between the panels of Spiegelman's narrative. Students could simply tell the story from a different character's point of view, adding narration from a new viewpoint, or they could be even more inventive, including new dialogue that was "deleted" from their scene, etc.

EVALUATION: Students will recreate a scene from Maus, writing and drawing a new comix story from the "unseen" portion of the tale.

LESSON THREE: Iconic Language and Comix

GUIDING QUESTION: How are pictures and visual imagery symbols and how are symbols used to relate meaning in comix?

SUBJECT AREAS: Language arts

GROUPING: Whole class instruction, individual students

MATERIALS: 8 1/2 x 11 paper, pencils, pens

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY LEVEL: Evaluation, synthesis

PRODUCTS AND OUTCOMES: An iconic language and a comix story utilizing that language

TIME FRAME: 1-2 class periods

PROCEDURE:

1. Students will engage in a class discussion of Art Spiegelman's use of anthropomorphism and iconic language in Maus; i.e. his utilization of symbols in his drawings (mice as Jews, cats as Nazis, etc.), as well as more subtle techniques like converting a road into a swastika, etc.
2. Students will create an iconic language of their own for

use in comix storytelling, a simple symbolic pictorial language: a tree could be a cross; the sun could be a circle with "heat wave" lines around it; a person could be a stick figure, etc. Students can be encouraged to be more inventive than the previous examples, however, and instructor can even limit choices or present options.

3. Students will construct a "legend" for their iconic language, explaining each one's meaning and symbolic value.

4. Students will write an outline for a short comix story based on the characters and/or settings of Maus (or even a story of their own).

5. Students will write and draw a comix short story, using only those symbols and pictorial icons to visually tell their tale, incorporating more conventional comix narrative techniques like word balloons, captions, etc.

EVALUATION: Students will create their own simply drawn comix story, utilizing an iconic language of their creation in the process.

LESSON FOUR: Comix Narrative and Dramatic Techniques

GUIDING QUESTION: How are comix narrative techniques similar to and different from narrative techniques employed on the stage?

SUBJECT AREAS: Language arts

GROUPING: Whole class, individual student, cooperative groups

MATERIALS: Some art materials like paper-mache, etc. for masks; paints; paper; other miscellaneous materials for scenery, etc.

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY LEVEL: Evaluation

PRODUCTS AND OUTCOMES: Masks and dramatic presentations based on Maus

TIME FRAME: 4-5 class periods

PROCEDURE:

1. In cooperative groups of 4-6 in number, students will construct masks based upon the anthropomorphic representations contained within Maus; mice, cats, dogs, pigs, etc.

2. Students will write a dramatic presentation of a scene from Maus, 10-15 minutes in length.
3. Students will create appropriate, simple props and scenery for their scene.
4. Students will practice and rehearse their presentations in small groups and individually, each portraying the different characters in their scene.
4. Students will perform their presentations, dressed in their masks and using whatever scenery and props they've created.
5. Class will engage in a criticism and discussion of each presentation, comparing and contrasting the different techniques used in both Spiegelman's graphic novel and in the students' plays.

EVALUATION: Students will create dramatic adaptations of scenes from Spiegelman's Maus, along with accompanying sets and masks.

LESSON FIVE: Anja's Journals

GUIDING QUESTION: What would Anja's journals have contained had Artie been able to see them?

SUBJECT AREAS: Language Arts

GROUPING: Individual student, whole class

MATERIALS: Spiral notebooks, paper, pencils and pens

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY LEVEL: Evaluation

PRODUCTS AND OUTCOMES: A mock journal/scrapbook

TIME FRAME: 2-3 class periods

Procedure:

1. Students will be instructed to review the events leading up to Anja's death in Maus, taking notes on all pertinent information and thoughts regarding her life up to, during, and proceeding her experiences at the camps.
2. Students will write journal entries as if in Anja's hand, creating a convincing diary of her life.

3. Students will be told that they are to include other noteworthy objects, drawings, photographs, etc., as part of a scrapbook of memories belonging to Anja.

4. Students will bring scrapbook elements, journal entries, and any other creative endeavors together as a "memory box" containing what they imagine to be the "missing thoughts" of Anja's.

EVALUATION: Students will create, write, and put together a mock "hope chest" or memory box that will contain journal entries and other scrapbook items that could belong to Anja.

MAUS VOCABULARY TERMS

The following terms and accompanying definitions can be used in the teaching of Maus. The terms are arranged more or less in the order in which they appear in the book. They are chiefly phrases and words used in relation to Poland and Germany and the various political and social factions of the time during World War Two:

1. Gemeinde: A Jewish community organization that worked with the Nazis to improve Jewish living conditions, controlling food coupon distribution, jobs, work permits, travel passes, etc.
2. SS: Nazi secret service agency which ensured that no one would try to overthrow the Nazi government.
3. Reichmarks: German currency that virtually replaced zlotys, the Polish currency of the time.
4. Food Coupons: Coupons used by the Jews after the Nazis took control of Poland and began rationing food and other items of worth. A Jew could only buy food using these coupons, and it was illegal to trade or buy food with cash.
5. Black Market: An illegal system of buying and trading food, utilized by the Jews in response to the scarcity of food coupons.

6. Aryan: The idealization of the German people by the Nazis, who promulgated the belief that blond haired and blue eyed people were the superior race. Ironically, Aryans are people from Northern India, Pakistan, and Southern Afghanistan and are neither blond haired nor blue eyed.

7. Ghetto: A neighborhood where the Nazis forced the Jews to live, surrounded by high barbed wire fences and armed guards. Living conditions were horrid, and it was not unusual for three or four families to occupy a single apartment.

8. Gestapo: Nazi secret police who were responsible for hunting down and capturing anyone they felt were a danger to the Nazi party, much like the SS men.

9. Bunkers: Various places the Jews built to hide from the Nazi SS and the Gestapo.

10. Liquidate: In context to the Holocaust, to empty a ghetto of its Jewish community, usually by shooting them or sending them to concentration camps.

11. "Juden raus:" German cry heard often at Nazi party rallies and the like, meaning "Out Jew(s)!"

12. Kominator: German word describing anyone who was a schemer, trickster, or con man, used by the Nazis to describe anyone against the party rhetoric.

13. Selektion or Selection: The area of the concentration camps where Jewish prisoners were ordered to strip and march in front of a camp doctor. The doctor then decided if they were healthy enough for work. If they were deemed unhealthy, they were often sent to the gas chambers.

14. Blocksperre: A German word referring to the times when concentration camp prisoners were ordered to stay in their sleeping quarters, usually because of some kind of problem like a revolt or missing persons.

15. Appel: A daily head count when the prison guards in the concentration camps counted and recounted every prisoner. This could last for hours, and was done even in freezing weather. Many prisoners died just from the cold alone.

16. Black work: The most dangerous and difficult work in the camps, assigned to those prisoners who were deemed ready to die anyway.

MAUS ESSAY QUESTIONS

The following essay questions embody all of the various Bloom's Taxonomy levels, and cover a wide range of ideas related to Maus, both as an historical work and a work of fiction. A teacher can pick and choose which questions are most appropriate for their classroom setting and grade level:

Answer each of the following questions in complete sentences, incorporating the questions into your responses in paragraph form. Use a separate piece of paper to write on, but feel free to write notes on this sheet as you're reading the chapters of Maus in class.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

1. What does Vladek mean by his remark, "Friends? Your friends? If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week. . . then you could see what it is, friends!" What does this suggest to you about Vladek's philosophies or attitudes on life?
2. Why does Vladek become upset when his wife Mala offers "Artie" a wire coat hanger for his coat? What does this reveal about these three characters and their relationship to each other, i.e. how do they feel about each other?

3. What does Vladek do to find out what kind of housekeeper Anja is? What does this action suggest to you about Vladek's possible reasons for wanting a wife?

4. What does Art promise his father Vladek at the end of Chapter 1? Does he keep that promise? How does the reader know if he kept his promise or not?

CHAPTER 2

1. What does Vladek call "junk food" and what is it for?

2. What was Anja, Vladek's fiancée, involved with that got her in trouble with the police? What did Vladek threaten to do if she didn't stop?

3. A "pogrom" (page 33) is defined as "a planned killing of helpless people carried out for reasons of race or religion." Discuss two to three things that happened to many Jews before the actual political killings began.

4. Why does Anja (with Vladek as support) go to a sanitarium? What do you think of Vladek's treatment of and attitude towards his wife during this time? In other words, what words would you use to describe Vladek during this time?

CHAPTER 3

1. Describe some of the methods Vladek's father used to try to keep his sons out of the army. Why do you think he went to these extremes? Do you agree or disagree with his actions?

2. Why was the Nazi soldier going to beat Vladek? What explanation did Vladek offer the soldier as an excuse for his actions? Was this explanation true? Would you have reacted similarly?

3. How do you feel about Vladek's treatment of his son in the present day? Based on what you've read so far about Vladek's life, what possible reasons might he have for his attitudes and actions (for example, making Art clean his plate, his frustration with cigarette ashes spilled on the carpet, etc.)?

4. Name at least three reasons why "parshas truma," a special reading of the scripture, is important to Vladek.

5. a) Spiegelman uses anthropomorphics (animals given human form) to tell his story in Maus. This leads to some interesting narrative techniques only possible in comix. For example, explain why Vladek is wearing a pig mask on page 64. What does this visual trick automatically tell the reader about the character's actions?

b) Also, Spiegelman has been criticized in some circles for his choice of depicting different races as different animals. What do you think of this choice? What do you think are some possible reasons he chose to depict Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, Americans as dogs, etc. Do you think these choices promote racial stereotypes or simply help facilitate the telling of Spiegelman's tale? Why?

6. Explain "the coat incident" that occurs at the end of Chapter 3. How do you feel about both Art and Vladek's actions and feelings?

CHAPTER 4

1. Explain exactly what kind of place the "ghetto" was for the Jews. Why do you think the Nazis set up these neighborhoods?

2. What were the Jewish police? What do you think of their actions?

3. Mala, Vladek's second wife, makes a statement about him: "He's more attached to things than to people!" Do you agree with her assessment of his character? Why or why not? What possible explanations might there be for Vladek's behavior if Mala's statement is true?

CHAPTER 5

1. What story does "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" tell? Identify at least two differences in the art styles used between this short story done by Spiegelman years ago and Maus. How do these differences in art style make you the reader react in a different way, either emotionally or intellectually?
2. In the "present-day" scenes with his son, Vladek speaks English in dialect (heavily accented language) but in the flashbacks, Art Spiegelman depicts him using what is considered more or less standard English. Why is this so? What reasons might Spiegelman have for this narrative choice?
3. When his wife Anja is in great despair, Vladek says to her: "To die, it's easy. . .but you have to struggle for life! Until the last moment we must struggle together!" Think of your own life. To what lengths would you go to survive? What would you do in order to preserve your own life? Anything? Is there a point at which you think it might be better to sacrifice your own life than to go on living? What would that point be? How important is individual life?
4. Look closely at the picture (and the words) in the bottom-left corner panel of page 125. What symbol has Spiegelman made the road into? Why has he done this, i.e. what message is he giving the reader through this simple but very

effective narrative device that could only be done in the medium of comix?

CHAPTER 6

1. "Irony" is defined as: "a method of humorous or sarcastic expression in which the intended meaning of words used is the direct opposite of their usual sense." How are Vladek's words in panel one of page 135 ironic, or possessing double meaning for the reader? Explain. How are the words "ARBEIT MACHT FREI" ["WORK WILL MAKE YOU FREE"] posted above the gate at Auschwitz on page 157 also ironic? Explain.

2. Why does the kind Mrs. Motonowa ask Vladek and Anja to leave from their hiding place at one point in the story? What does this tell you can happen to even the best of people under harsh circumstances? Would you have reacted differently from Mrs. Motonowa under similar circumstances? Why or why not?

3. Why does Art, in a fit of rage, call his father a murderer at the end of Chapter 6, i.e., what does Vladek do to cause Spiegelman to call him this? Since Vladek doesn't actually, physically kill anyone, how does this term possibly apply to him in Art's mind?

PART II

CHAPTER 1

1. Why did Vladek say he called Art and what was his real reason for calling? Why did he lie? At this point in the story, who do you most sympathize with, Mala or Vladek? Why?
2. What is Zyklon B? What was its only use in the camps?
3. What does Art mean when he says to Francoise: "It's spooky, having sibling rivalry with a snapshot." How does Art feel about his brother?
4. In relating about his first experiences in Auschwitz, Vladek says: "They registered us in. . .They took from us our names. And here they put me my number." Besides simple efficiency, what reason would the Nazis have to "take" from people their names? In what ways are names powerful?

CHAPTER 2

1. Why do you think Spiegelman has chosen to depict himself and others in the first few pages of Chapter 2 as wearing animal masks instead of just using anthropomorphics as he's done so far? And why does he show himself becoming a child during different parts of these opening pages?
2. What does Art's psychiatrist mean when he postulates,

"People haven't changed. . . Maybe they need a newer, bigger Holocaust." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

3. Explain some circumstances under which Vladek was able to know of or even see Anja while he was in Auschwitz.

4. Explain what "black work" was.

5. Describe in your own words some of the methods of execution in the concentration camps.

6. Art says at one point to his father: "I don't get it. . . why didn't the Jews at least try to resist?" Explain how Vladek answers this very good question and write down any ideas you might have yourself about this.

CHAPTER 3

1. As the war drew closer to Auschwitz and the Nazis planned to move all the prisoners to another location, what plan did Vladek and some of the prisoners have? Why didn't it succeed?

2. Describe the conditions on the trains. In what ways were the Jews and other camp victims treated like animals during the Holocaust? Why do you think some humans are able to treat other humans like this?

3. While Vladek is trying to return his groceries, Art and

Francoise are having a discussion about him. Francoise remarks that "it's a miracle [Vladek] survived" the concentration camps, and Art replies that "in some ways he didn't survive." What do you think Art meant by this? In what ways has Vladek perhaps not survived?

4. What do you think of Vladek's behavior, thoughts, and actions towards the hitch-hiker at the end of this chapter? What is racism? Why do you think racism exists and how can it be combated?

CHAPTER 4

1. From your readings in this and previous chapters, what do you surmise the role and purpose of the Red Cross to be? What are its goals? Why does it exist? Why do you think that, even in the midst of war, humanitarian efforts are made?

2. Explain briefly the circumstances that Vladek found himself in towards the end of the war. How did he gain and lose and gain again his freedom? What did he do to survive? Who helped him? Who hindered him?

3. Who called Vladek "Willie"? Describe how the people who gave him this nickname played a role in Vladek's freedom at the end of the war.

4. Back in the present day, what does the box contain that

Vladek shows to Art? Look at these items carefully on pages 114, 115, and 116. What feelings do you have as you peruse these "valuables." Why are they valuable? What valuables do you own that may not possess monetary value and why are they valuable to you anyway? How do the things that we treasure reflect our character and personal ethics?

CHAPTER 5

1. What is it about Vladek that instigates Art's trip to Florida, and who else is there who we haven't seen for a while?
2. What predictions did the gypsy make to Anja and did they come true? How?
3. Look at the real photo of Vladek on page 134. Where did he take this photograph? Where did he get the clothing? What feelings do you have as you look upon it?
4. In the very last panel of the book, why is it that Vladek calls Art "Richieu"? What does this reveal to you about Vladek, his relationship to Art, his mental condition, and his feelings about his lost son?

SUMMARY QUESTION

Explain your overall reaction to this "drawn novel." What impact did it have on you? What did it teach you? In what ways is this story especially powerful in comix form, as opposed to film or prose? What techniques (besides the obvious use of anthropomorphism) are utilized in this "graphic novel" that could only be done within the confines of "comic book" narrative? Could this comix novel be adapted to film or prose? Why or why not? Did you like this book? Explain your reasons why or why not.

NON-LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUMS AND COMIX

Although no standard, conventional lesson plans will be provided for non-language arts classes, comix can easily be incorporated into a variety of curricular studies. Here are just a few ideas.

The Sciences:

Using comix works like Larry Marder's Beanworld or Larry Gonick's Cartoon Guides [see "100 Graphic Novels for Young Adults" following this section], instruction in the sciences can be augmented with fun, entertaining comix reading. The U.S. military learned long ago how helpful the comix format of instruction can be, using words and pictures in sequence to augment and explain difficult to grasp ideas. Text is often accompanied by illustrations to facilitate learning, but there is something even more powerful and captivating about the fusion of words and pictures embodied within comix. Teachers can easily bring in whole comix textbooks like those mentioned or simply use portions of them to aide in instruction. Other ideas could include:

- creating comix as an instructor to explain hard to grasp concepts
- creating comix in the form of instructions to aide in the completion of experiments and labs

- requiring students to explain science principles and theories in comix form, using words and pictures to explain their ideas
- using simple four-panel comic strip type sequencing to demonstrate lab results, etc.
- creating brief comix biographies of scientific figures in history

Instructors in the sciences can come up with many other ways to incorporate the use of comix in their classes.

Mathematics:

There are some comix works appropriate to the study of mathematics, such as Larry Gonick's Cartoon Guide to Statistics, which can be brought in as a supplement to the regularly taught textbooks. Although the number of comix resources for mathematics courses is admittedly more scarce than for other curriculums, a teacher can nonetheless use comix-related materials by:

- requiring students to study the iconic and symbol-laden language of more minimalist comix narratives as a way of learning non-language based communication [see Lesson Plan Three in this chapter].

- creating a comix narrative to serve as easy-to-follow instructions for more difficult tasks
- having students create mathematics word problems through comix

Teachers in mathematics can no doubt think of even more creative ways to incorporate sequential words and pictures into their curriculums.

Social Sciences/History:

Social science courses are, in some ways, more easily integrated with language arts classes than are mathematics or the sciences, and this is the case with the utilization of comix in their classrooms as well. There are many historical fiction, historical fact, and biographical graphic novels and comix that could be used as supplementary material [see the listings for Maus, Comanche Moon, Marilyn: A Woman's Story, and Usagi Yojimbo in this chapter, just to name a few].

Supplementary reading outside the class and in-class novel reading about times and settings being studied in social science courses are not new ideas. At the very least, teachers in the social sciences can make use of the comix medium and the many works appropriate to their grade level and subject matter in the same way that they can make use of prose novels, films, video biographies, etc. In addition, social science teachers could add to their instruction

palette by:

- having students create their own comix biographies, depicting the lives of figures in history being studied
- playing "hot seat," in which students portray different characters and/or historical figures from comix narratives [i.e. Vladek from Maus], and then answer questions about their lives and social backgrounds, etc.
- choosing different historical artistic styles from eras places being studied (ancient Egypt, medieval Japan, etc.), construct a brief comix story about a day-in-the-life of a citizen, utilizing ONLY the artistic techniques, tools, and styles appropriate to the locale

There are many other ideas that teachers can come up with, especially those that are cross-curricular with language arts

Foreign Languages:

First- and second-generation immigrants in this country have played a major role in the development of comix and comix storytelling, perhaps in part because many of them learned to read through comic books and comic strips. Instructors teaching foreign languages would do well to incorporate foreign language comix in their classrooms,

teaching students the more common vernacular and idiom no doubt present in them, as well as utilizing the comprehensive input that the visual part of comix provide when the words are not understood.

Art:

This area of instruction is the most obvious to connect to comix, but there is more to the medium than what is usually seen, taught, or exhibited in relation to sequential art in the public schools. It seems that art is often taught as an isolated curriculum in the middle schools and high schools, even more so than mathematics. This doesn't have to be so. Indeed, the storytelling and illustrative aspects of comix can serve as the perfect bridge between the visual and the language arts. There is no reason why an English instructor and an art teacher can't come up with a virtual cornucopia of co-curricular studies, reading assignments, and projects that would enrich students in both classes, including:

- collaborative assignments where art students team up with language arts students to produce the disparate parts that make up the comix narrative whole
- adaptive assignments, turning comix stories into prose and prose stories into comix

- in-depth studies of Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics [see list in this chapter] and analyses (both written and visual) of what makes comix work as a medium

Art teachers would be remiss in not using comix as a link not only to language arts courses, but history and science (and even math) courses as well. Comix, through many of the works discussed in the coming section of this chapter, can serve as a bridge between many different curriculums, making connections, establishing points of comparative study, and generally bringing together fields that are still, unfortunately, often taught in isolation.

100 Graphic Novels for Young Adults

The following is a list of graphic novels and comix compilations, alphabetized by title with the artist and publisher supplied for your convenience. Following each entry is a brief summary of the book and a critique of its contents. At the end of each critique you will find a short evaluation as to the work's age/grade appropriateness and a recommendation for which curriculum the work would be most suitable. These comix are compiled from books that I actually own or have read, and this is in no way meant as an all-inclusive list. They are all available in trade paperback or, in a very few cases, only in hardback, but I've stuck mainly to books that are single and complete entities unto themselves. The comix medium is rife with ongoing series and serialized storylines that continue ad nauseum, but I've kept this list to comix works that stand alone like a novel, film, or play. There is also a sampling of anthologies that offers a variety of shorter stories in comix form, and complete graphic novels that are published as multiple volumes due to length; (for example, the Sandman books are actually one whole story over 1800 pages in length). These books represent a wide range of genres, from satire to autobiography and historical fiction, from science fiction and fantasy to travelogue, but they all possess a high degree of artistic integrity, relate powerful human themes, and superbly utilize the tools of the medium of comix. The key ingredient to all of these books: GREAT, LITERATE STORIES.

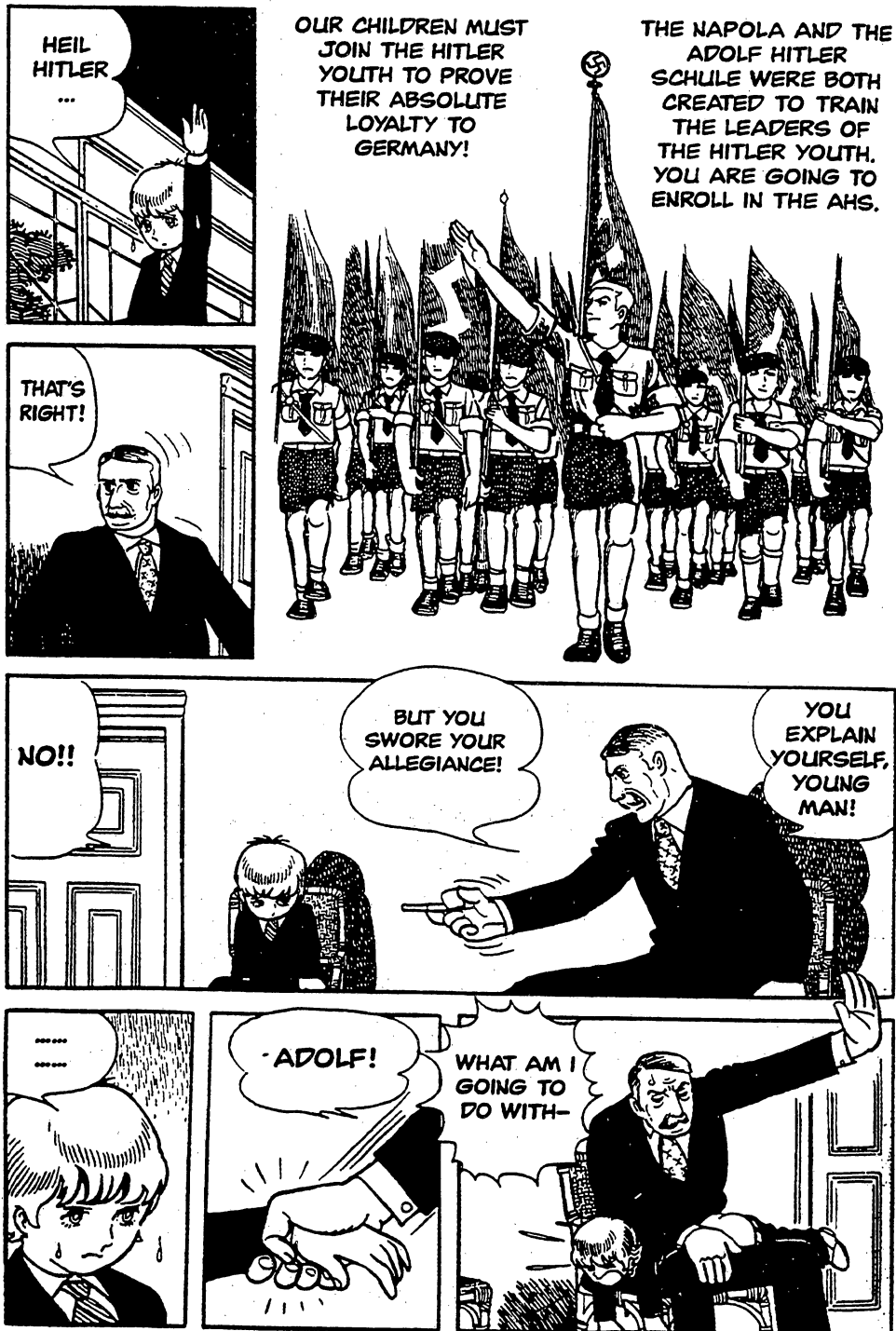


Figure 1. A young boy learns an early lesson about the importance of conformity in Adolf. © 1995 Tezuka Productions.

1. Adolf: A Tale of the Twentieth Century

Adolf: An Exile in Japan

Adolf: The Half-Aryan

Adolf: Days of Infamy

Adolf: 1945 and All That Remains

Osamu Tezuka

Cadence Books

Adolf is a long comix novel from Japan that relates the story of three characters named Adolf, including the dictator of World War Two's Nazi-led Germany. Clocking in at over twelve-hundred pages, this ambitious manga is an intriguing examination of racism, nationalism, and how the two can intermingle and combine with alarming and disastrous results. The three "Adolfs" in the story (including a young German-Japanese boy) provide the focus for a plot that is a mystery and a spy-thriller and a chilling historical fable all rolled up into one.

Adolf contains some violence and sparse language; most suitable for eighth grade and up; makes a superb companion piece to Barefoot Gen and Maus [see entries 6 and 59]; appropriate for both language arts and social studies/history courses.

2. Akiko: Volume I

Akiko: Volume II

Mark Crilley

Sirius

Akiko is the genuinely charming story of the title

character (who is from earth) and her adventures on and off the planet Smoo. She's joined by such lively companions as Spuckler, the reckless and brave adventurer, Mr. Beeba, the fatherly worrier, Gax, the faithful robot aide, and the floating, bodiless enigma who is Poog. In these first two of what is promised to be many volumes, Akiko and her friends search for Alia Rellapor, "once the loveliest woman in the galaxy," who has kidnapped the Prince of Smoo. It turns out that Alia, now the "sworn enemy" of the king, was in actuality the wife of the king and is the mother of the Prince.

This story is refreshingly layered for an innocent fairy tale; suitable for all ages, but most palatable for preteens, fifth grade and up; good for language arts and, perhaps, science classes.

3. The American Splendor Anthology

The New American Splendor Anthology

Harvey Pekar and various

Four Walls Eight Windows

Pekar and a wide range of artists do comix stories about Harvey's life in Cleveland as a file clerk. The loose plot lines of this collection of short stories focus on a memorable cast of characters who endear the reader to their idiosyncrasies, but the real power of the stories comes from Harvey's unflinching examination of the truly mundane acts that people engage in daily.

Pick and choose which stories to incorporate into your



Figure 2. Harvey Pekar encounters a self-proclaimed nerd in American Splendor. © 1991 Harvey Pekar

classes, since some can be very adult (nudity and harsh language) while others are completely innocuous and suitable for seventh grade and up; many of the stories are appropriate for language arts and advanced literary studies.

4. Animal Man

Grant Morrison, Chas Truog, and Tom Grummett
DC Comics

This book is one of the few examples of metafiction done within the confines of the comix medium, and is an excellent foray into the genre. The story begins with Buddy Baker, who seems to be your typical fantasy-superhero character who stumbles across a space ship as a young man and receives the bizarre powers to adapt any ability that an animal possesses for a short period of time (the flight of an eagle, the strength of an elephant, even the time perceptions of a fly, etc.). Early on in the book, however, things become very strange. People, including Buddy, begin to see beyond the "reality" of the printed page they find themselves in, and, through a succession of events culminating in a south-western desert, actually learn that they are nothing more than "minor characters in a bad story." Buddy Baker's final meeting with his own writer, Grant Morrison, and the subsequent examinations of comix narrative, are delightful and revealing.

Animal Man contains some sparse language and typical superhero violence; suitable for seventh grade and up; most appropriate for language arts, literary studies, and

especially as an entertaining study of the narrative structure of the comix medium.

5. Astro City

Kurt Busiek and Brent Anderson

Image Comics

This series of interconnected stories takes place in the surreal Astro City, a vast, sprawling urban setting that could be Metropolis or Gotham City or Marvel Comics' New York. It is filled to bursting with superheroes, and Kurt Busiek and Brent Anderson utilize this bizarre outcropping genre that most people associate with comic books to tell sometimes poignant, sometimes funny, sometimes satirical, but always human stories about the various masked vigilantes and caped crusaders that populate Astro City. Anderson's drawings are almost classical American, rendered with no small amount of jarring realism, and Busiek's stories are filled with pathos. The first story, for example, is about a character who looks and behaves suspiciously like Superman, and finds himself counting the seconds and half-seconds of free flying time that he manages to enjoy in between heroic deeds. The end result is a strangely sad tale of isolation and heroism.

Astro City is appropriate for all ages, fifth grade and up; contains some mild language; most suitable for language arts curriculums.

6. Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon History of Hiroshima

Barefoot Gen: The Day After

Barefoot Gen: Life After the Bomb

Barefoot Gen: Out of the Ashes

Keiji Nakazawa

New Society Publishers

Barefoot Gen is another massive Japanese undertaking (about one-thousand pages) which draws heavily on the personal experiences of the author, Nakazawa, who lived through the atomic bombing of Hiroshima as a boy. The story is moving and historically important, and, although Japanese comix tend towards the melodramatic (to an American sensibility) it's a great story. Like Adolf [see entry 1], this book is a compelling examination of World War Two from the Japanese perspective, but it also does much more and is the superior literary work between the two. It depicts, unflinchingly, the horrors of surviving a nuclear bombing, and shows without visual or narrative reserve what that survival entailed. It's a graphic novel about subject matter that very few people could discuss in any medium, and Nakazawa does it skillfully, blending fast-paced cinematic techniques with moving drama and surprising touches of subtlety.

Due to the graphic depiction of destruction and death in the first volume, this may be better suited for high school, but students as young as seventh grade could read it and be enthralled by Nakazawa's work; some mild language as well; most appropriate for language arts and social studies, and would be an excellent graphic novel in cross-curricular studies between the two.



Figure 3. The first few minutes after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima from Barefoot Gen. © 1987 Keiji Nakazawa

Note: There is also an excellent (although graphic) sixty minute video/anime adaptation of this comix work.

7. Batman: Year One

Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli

DC Comics

This story helped reinvent the Batman mythos, and retells the origin of Batman in a fast-moving, riveting narrative which leaves no room for boredom. Mazzucchelli renders his figures in a fluid, powerful style. The plot itself is more than just an "origin story" for Batman, though, and is more in line with the conventions of great pulp stories and crime fiction of the '30's and '40's. Miller and Mazzucchelli really experiment with the form of comix narrative as well, pushing the envelope of panel-to-panel transitions and using bare-boned first-person narration that highlights action without undercutting the completely convincing characterization of familiar figures like Catwoman, Gordon, Alfred, etc. Don't expect these characters to behave as you've seen them in the movies or t.v., however. There is something decidedly more subversive and interesting going on in this great graphic novel.

Year One is suitable for all ages in terms of subject matter, but I think it would be best studied by high school students, ninth grade and up; some mild language, some violence; most appropriate for a language arts class.

Note: This is an excellent companion piece to The Dark Knight Returns [see entry 8], and serves in many ways as the

first "book end" of the two stories that Miller wrote about one of his favorite characters in comic books.

8. Batman: The Dark Knight Returns

Frank Miller and Klaus Janson

DC Comics

This is the last story of the Batman, at least according to Frank Miller. It's been ten years since Batman disappeared, and Bruce Wayne is forced once again to don the cape and cowl of the bat. This story is both written and drawn by Miller, and seems a little more "wild at heart" than its companion piece, Batman: Year One [see entry 7]. However, it does an outstanding job of dealing with themes of vigilantism and crime, and plays with the conventions of the superhero genre along the way. For example, Superman appears towards the end of the story, and functions as a counter-point to Batman. While these two most famous superheroes battle out their philosophical differences on the page, their "fight scene" is in many respects a metaphor for and debate about all that superhero comic books have served up to American youth for the last fifty years.

This graphic novel, like its "book end" companion, is most appropriate for high school students, and should definitely be read after Year One.

9. Beanworld

Larry Marder

Beanworld Press



Figure 4. The unintentional cruelty of the food chain, as seen in Beanworld. © 1995 Larry Marder

Larry Marder has truly created his own universe in this story of bean-like creatures who are subservient (as are we all) to a precise, yet simple, ecology. The reader is treated to a tale of what these bean-like creatures must do to survive in their world without disrupting the precarious balance of nature, while still retaining and utilizing a certain amount of free will. The drawings are simple and amazingly communicative, and the denizens of this imaginary world are charming and surprisingly funny.

Beanworld is suitable for all ages, fifth grade and up. The graphic novel would be most appropriate for science classes at the middle school and high school levels.

10. The Big Book of Conspiracies

The Big Book of Urban Legends

The Big Book of Death

The Big Book of Little Criminals

The Big Book of Thugs

The Big Book of Conspiracies

The Big Book of Weirdos

The Big Book of Hoaxes

The Big Book of Freaks

The Big Book of Losers

The Big Book of the Unexplained

The Big Book of Martyrs

The Big Book of Scandal

The Big Book of Bad

Various

Paradox Press

These thick volumes have literally hundreds of short stories (usually 1-2 pages each) dealing with the subjects suggested by the books' titles. Ranging from the mildly inane to the genuinely inspired, these stories are valuable for their attempt to document in comix form tales that have rarely seen print in a fun (and often tongue-in-cheek) manner.

Suitable for all ages; however, since some stories may be a bit ribald or irreverent, pick and choose which you could incorporate into your curriculums. These stories are best used augmentively, and are not what I'd refer to as high literature by any means; fun, though; appropriate for a variety of curriculums.

11. The Big Wheels

Graham Chaffee

Fantagraphics

Chaffee combines simple, straightforward brush work with sparse dialogue to create a series of interconnected vignettes that follows different denizens of the city throughout their day, lightly touching on each character's story and life. The narrative devices employed have been used before in film and prose, but the quiet subtlety of the overall story make for a really enjoyable read, and the narrative techniques specifically draw on the strengths of comix narrative. Chaffee's storytelling skills are exceptional and, like The Most Important Thing and Other



Figure 5. Two small early morning conflicts endured while living in the city from The Big Wheels. © 1992 Graham Chaffee

Stories [see entry 62] this book is wonderful to read.

The Big Wheels is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mature themes; appropriate for language arts.

12. Bone: Out from Boneville

Bone: The Great Cow Race

Bone: Eyes of the Storm

Bone: The DragonSlayer

Bone: Rock Jaw

Jeff Smith

Cartoon Books

These five volumes comprise roughly one-half of a whimsical fantasy about a hidden valley filled with humans, "rat-creatures", and three lost brothers. Although the story is more or less a simple fairy tale in structure, Smith doesn't "write down" to his readers, and incorporates great pacing with often hilarious timing and dialogue. Characters such as Bone, Thorn, Gran'ma Ben, Smiley Bone, and Lucius are thoroughly enjoyable and believable, and the themes and plot-line of the story is layered enough to be enjoyed by children and adults.

Suitable for all ages, but younger readers in fifth, sixth, and seventh grade would probably like it more; appropriate for language arts.

Note: If you have young children, you may have seen colorized versions of the first few chapters of these stories in Disney's Disney Digest.

13. The Books of Magic

John Bolton, Scott Hampton, Charles Vess, Paul Johnson, and Neil Gaiman,

The Books of Magic: Bindings

The Books of Magic: Summonings

The Books of Magic: Reckonings

The Books of Magic: Transformations

John Ney Rieber, Gary Amaro, Peter Gross, and Peter Snejbjerg
Vertigo

Experience a year in the life of thirteen year old Timothy Hunter, destined to be the world's next great wizard. This story is not a children's fantasy, and deals forthrightly with real issues of adolescence while spinning an involving yarn about a young boy who chooses to live in a world where dragons sleep in caves on top of huge treasures, fairies actually live in a Land of Eternal Summer, and magic really does exist. That world, however, is ours, and young Tim must learn to live in it while being instructed in the ways of magic.

Suitable for eighth grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts.

14. The Building

Will Eisner

Kitchen Sink Press

This charming urban folk tale depicts the life of a single building in the big city and tells the stories of four of its occupants. The tale covers decades and yet geographically stays constant, so that not only do we get to

see the characters age and learn and die, but we also get to see the same changes occur to the building itself. Will Eisner is one of the oldest practitioners of comix for adults, and this, along with his other books [see entries 22, 29, 40, 49, 78, and 85] should be read by anyone truly interested in exploring comix as a literate medium of storytelling.

The Building is most suitable for high school students, ninth grade and up; some mild language; mature themes; most appropriate for language arts.

15. Cadillacs and Dinosaurs

Cadillacs and Dinosaurs: Dinosaur Shaman

Cadillacs and Dinosaurs: Time in Overdrive

Mark Shultz

Kitchen Sink Press

Originally published as the comix series Xenozoic Tales, this ecological science fiction story follows the adventures of Jack "Cadillac" Tenrec and his paramour Hannah Dundee in an evolution-gone-crazy future America where many diverse species from many different eras, including dinosaurs, roam the land. These books could be just another Jurassic Park but for the ravishingly beautiful artwork by Shultz and the meticulous thought that goes into his story. More than just an excuse for an action story with dinosaurs, the "xenozoic age" offers a beautiful, alluring backdrop to questions concerning the environment, man's place within it, and all the morality, immorality, and amorality that lies in between.

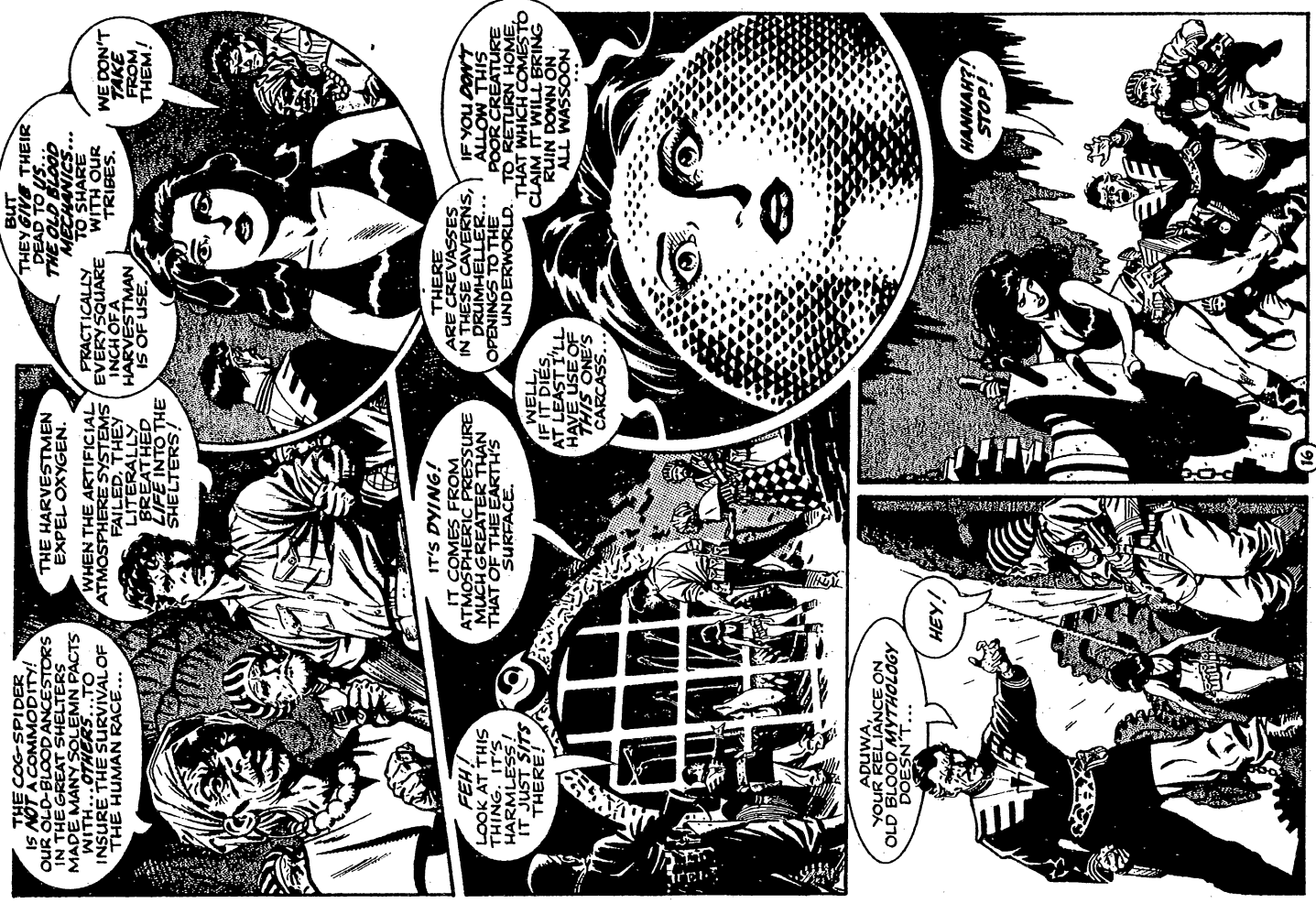


Figure 6. Hannah feels a surge of ecological responsibility in Cadillacs and Dinosaurs. © 1996 Mark Schultz

This story is suitable for all ages, but would be appreciated most by eighth grade students and up; appropriate for language arts and as supplementary material for science classes.

Note: This material was adapted into a briefly seen series of Saturday morning cartoons; unsuccessful, more than likely, because of the absence of Shultz's lavish artwork and multi-layered thematic studies.

16. Cartoon History of the Universe: Volume I

Cartoon History of the Universe: Volume II

Cartoon History of the United States

Cartoon Guide to Physics

Cartoon Guide to the Environment

Cartoon Guide to Computer Science

Cartoon Guide to Genetics

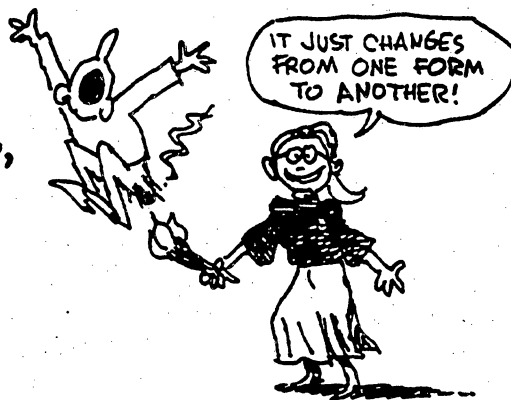
Cartoon Guide to (Non) Communication

Larry Gonick

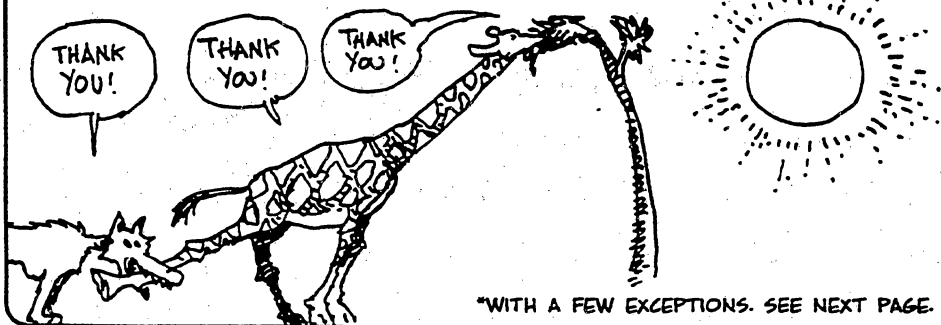
Doubleday

Larry Gonick, along with such professionals as Alice Outwater (an MIT-educated wastewater engineer) and others, has created a small library of humorous and highly educational books. These works, and works like them, should not supplant the textbooks and learning tools already employed in the classroom, but if they facilitate learning, if they help increase comprehension, if they aide in the education process, why not use them? Why not experiment with a tool of teaching that is already used by governments,

ACCORDING TO THE
**FIRST LAW OF
THERMODYNAMICS,**
ENERGY IS NEITHER
CREATED NOR DESTROYED.



NONE OF THESE DEVOURINGS CAN CREATE ANY NEW ENERGY: THEY JUST PASS ALONG ENERGY THAT CAME FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE. AND WHERE IS THAT? IF YOU TRACE BACK THE LINKS OF ANY FOOD CHAIN FAR ENOUGH, YOU'LL COME TO A **PLANT**, WHICH GOT ITS ENERGY STRAIGHT FROM THE **SUN**. ALL LIFE DEPENDS ULTIMATELY ON THE **SUN**.*



UNTIL HUMANITY CAME ALONG, THERE WERE ONLY TWO WAYS FOR LIVING BEINGS TO GET ENERGY: SIT IN A WARM PLACE, OR EAT SOMETHING!



Figure 7. The first law of thermodynamics, Cartoon Guide to Physics style. © 1990 Lawrence Gonick and Arthur Huffman

corporations, and schools around the world, but one which is so quickly dismissed here in this country (excepting the U.S. military, strangely enough)?

These books illustrate (pun intended) how even complex information about the nature of nature and the ideas of science can be related in a straightforward, enlightening, entertaining way without losing sight of the original goal of the author: to teach, to instruct, to educate, and to incite interest in subject matter that can sometimes be dry, lifeless, boring, and altogether too sterile. Gonick does a wonderful job of making history and science not only entertainingly educational, but funny as well. His light satire on human foibles and his pun-filled narrative tendencies make these books ones that other textbook writers can not only respect, but envy for Gonick's wit and honesty.

Gonick's textbook-comix are suitable for all ages, fifth grade and up; appropriate for studies in compatible courses, from science classes to computer courses to communications studies.

17. Castle Waiting

Linda Medley

Olio

Have you ever wondered what happened to the Three Little Pigs after the Big Bad Wolf was foiled? What was the final fate of Jack Sprat? What was it like for the beautiful maiden after she was kissed by the young, gallant Prince and supposedly lived "happily ever after" with him in his

kingdom? Linda Medley wonders all of these things, and has appropriated a number of familiar looking characters and settings from such places as Mother Goose and the Grimm Brother's Fairy Tales and injected them into her own very unique world. This is not satire, though. There's nothing but respect and warmth for old fairy stories and folk tales in this beautifully drawn story, which centers around Lady Jain, a young pregnant woman who the reader meets as she's leaving her home town and abusive husband to journey across a magical (yet still mundane) world in search of the mythical refuge called "Castle Waiting." This story is painstakingly drawn in beautiful, simple black-and-white, and is no less elegantly written.

Medley's story is suitable for fifth grade and up; most appropriate for language arts classes.

18. Cheap Novelties: The Pleasures of Urban Decay

Cheap Novelties: Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer

Ben Katchor

Penguin Books/Little Brown and Company

Julius Knipl is a real estate photographer who roams the streets of the city seeing what others miss as they walk. Through his eyes the reader views the city not only as it is but as it was and could be. These two collections of short stories give the accumulative affect of going back to your old neighborhood twenty years after you left it. They are sad, nostalgic stories at times, but also fill the imagination with wonder and curiosity at the architecture and

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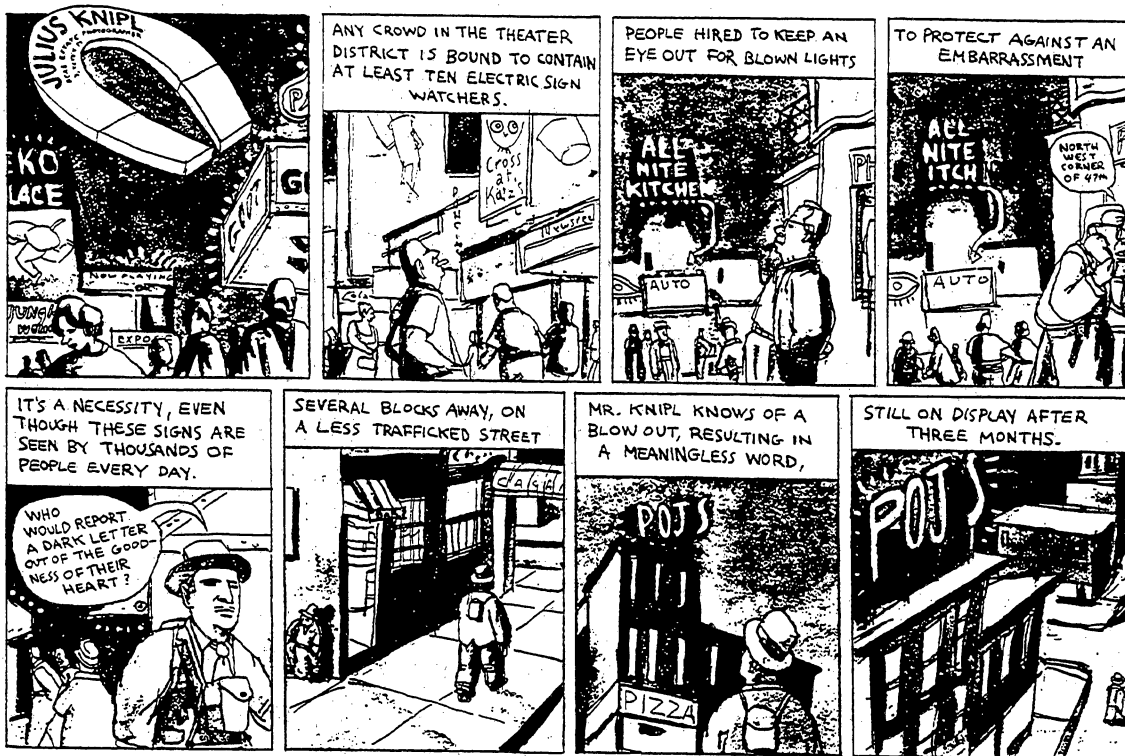
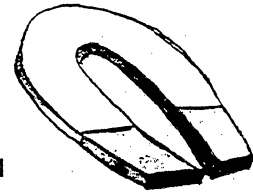


Figure 8. Julius Knipl ponders the mysterious sadness of blown lights from Cheap Novelties. © 1991 Gen Katchor

artificial landscape that human beings create.

These stories are suitable for eighth grade and up, and range from a page in length to over twenty; each one is unique and much more deep in meaning than it appears on the surface, so it's best to flip through and read all of the stories to get a feel for what Katchor is doing with these sometimes eerie comix; appropriate for language arts classes and, perhaps, social studies courses.

19. Paul Auster's City of Glass

Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli

Avon

This is the only graphic novel that made it into this list of recommendations which is an adaptation from another medium. This was originally the first novel of a trilogy by Paul Auster, and was as much a study on language as it was a mystery/detective story. Adaptations from prose (or film, for that matter) rarely work in comix, and hence I've stayed away from them here, but this comix story is exceptionally done, more for what it doesn't try to do as what it does. It doesn't try to be the original novel. What it does is relate a story of mixed identities and mysterious unknowns and, in the process, offer a study of comix language. As much as the original novel was a study of the written word, this work is an examination of communication through words and pictures, or comix.

This book contains some harsh language and some nudity; suitable for high school students, tenth grade and up;



Figure 9. An argument for a new language in Peter Auster's City of Glass. © 1994 Bob Callahan Studios

especially appropriate for students engaged in an advanced study of comix narrative within language arts classes.

20. Comanche Moon

Jack Jackson

Rip Off Press

Recently, there have been some outstanding attempts to publish in comix form the story of U.S. history from non-traditional viewpoints. Far from being translucent attempts to simply slant historical perspective or, even worse, being overly dramatic, controversial sensationalism, these comix, especially the works of Jack Jackson, often choose to reveal the important role non-caucasian people have played in America's past [see also Los Tejanos, entry 52]. Jackson is most interested in Texas history, and many of his stories are about the southwest. In this moving, telling graphic history, he reveals the fate of Cynthia Ann Parker, a little white girl who, in 1836, was taken from her home by Comanche Indians and lived among them the remainder of her life. She bore a son named Quanah, who would play a key role in both the destruction of the Comanche people and their eventual integration into white culture.

This book is suitable for eighth grade and up; violence and sparse nudity; most appropriate in language arts classes and social studies/history courses.

21. Concrete: Complete Short Stories 1986-1989

Concrete: Short Stories 1990-1995

The Complete Concrete

Paul Chadwick

Dark Horse

Although on the outside belonging to the genre of fantasy, these short stories about a man trapped in the rocky body of a monster are poignant contemplations on the nature of man and his place in the world. For the most part, Chadwick stays away from dramatic stories and instead focuses on the subtle nuances of his characters. The title character is actually Ronald Lithgow, a former senatorial speech writer, who was abducted by aliens in the mountains and narrowly escaped, but only after his brain was transplanted into a hulkish, rocky form that is virtually indestructible. What is great about these stories is Chadwick's quiet, subtle tone. Done by anyone else, Concrete would no doubt be portrayed as an angry, bitter vigilante, determined to avenge his foul fate upon the various liquor store robbers and car-jackers he might stumble across. Instead, the reader is treated to stories that chronicle, among other things, a failed attempt to climb Mt. Everest, a quiet evening in the desert, and various other tales that refuse to be pigeon-holed into a genre.

All of these stories are suitable for seventh grade and up; some mild language; most appropriate for language arts.

22. A Contract with God

Will Eisner

Kitchen Sink Press



Figure 10. Basic metaphysics and mortal outrage from A Contract with God. © 1978 Will Eisner

This is Eisner's first (and some say best) foray into the graphic novel format. There are four self-contained short stories, all centering around a series of tenement houses on Dropsie Avenue in Brooklyn. Far and away the best of the four works is the title story, a dramatic but moving tale about a man who loses faith in God after losing his adoptive daughter. Read and compare this book with Eisner's other stirring comix novels [see entries 14, 29, 40, 49, 78, and 85].

This book is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts.

23. Daredevil: Man Without Fear

Daredevil: Born Again

Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli

Marvel

By the author and artists of the two Batman books listed [see entries 7 and 8], Daredevil is gritty crime fiction with the deceptive trappings of the superhero. The title character is blind defense attorney Matt Murdock, an Irish-Catholic man with a strong sense of justice. He is also Daredevil, a vigilante garbed in the red-horned mask of a devil in order to inspire fear into the criminals he stalks. When Matt Murdock was a boy, he was struck across the eyes by a radioactive isotope which blinded him but heightened his remaining four senses to superhuman degrees. He can "read" the writing on a letter by the faint impression left on the

paper by the ink it was written in; he can identify a person by the scent of their perfume or the natural musk of their body chemistry; he can taste the number of grains of salt on a pretzel; he can hear a faint heartbeat from around the corner. He uses these abilities in adulthood to guard and watch over his native city of Hell's Kitchen, New York. What makes these stories so captivating, though (beyond the novelty of being about a handicapped superhero) is the interplay of ideologies that Matt Murdock must juggle in order to maintain his identities as both defense attorney and vigilante.

Of these two stories, Born Again is the most powerful, but also contains some mature themes that Man Without Fear does not; both books would be best read by ninth graders and up; most appropriate for language arts classes.

24. Death: The High Cost of Living

Neil Gaiman and Chris Bachalo

Vertigo

This book isn't quite as good as Gaiman's Sandman stories [see entry 73], but it still ranks above most of the fantasy work being done in comix. The lead character is Death herself, who (in this incarnation, at least) is a gothic punk girly girl who wears too much eye make-up and has a--ahem--terminally good humor about life. She is only one of a family of "gods who are not gods" who govern various aspects of mortality. The story depicts the day when Death must become mortal (this happens once per century as the cost she pays

for taking human lives), and shows the various immortals and would-be magicians who attempt to track her down and kill her or use her for their various schemes. One of the most memorable characters in this story is Mad Hettie, a bag lady who is over two hundred years old, who has forgotten where she has placed her heart, and is determined to find mortal Death and ask her for her heart back so that she can finally die.

This story is most suitable for eighth grade and up; contains some mature themes; most appropriate for language arts classes.

25. A Distant Soil

Colleen Doran

Aria Press

This book chronicles the lives of a brother and sister who discover that their parents, and hence they, are of extraterrestrial origin. While earthly in appearance, each of them possesses abilities like telekinesis and telepathy that set them apart from humanity. When their parents are killed and the two siblings find themselves at the mercy of natives of their home planet coming to invade earth, they must choose sides in the coming war and come to terms with themselves and their loyalties. This book is good, solid science fiction with gorgeous, delicate line work.

A Distant Soil is a work in progress, but the story so far is competent and enjoyable fantasy fare suitable for seventh grade and up; most appropriate for language arts.



Figure 11. Cross-cultural friendship far from earth in A Distant Soil. © 1998 Colleen Doran

26. The Doom Patrol

Grant Morrison and Richard Case

DC Comics

This is genuinely bizarre writing, even by superhero comix standards. While firmly rooted in that decidedly American genre, this series takes the superhero to its ultimate absurdist ends. The Doom Patrol are a loosely-knit group of outsiders who gather together more for a sense of family and belonging than anything else, but they hurl themselves at all sorts of weird threats, like the Scissor Men (who come from a world created by an existential book) and Red Jack (who claims to be both the incarnation of Jack the Ripper and God). The Doom Patrol itself consists of Robotman, an ex-race car driver whose body was destroyed in a crash and whose brain now resides within a clunky metal form; Crazy Jane, who was abused as a child and now has sixty-four different personalities, each with its own metahuman ability; Rebus, a creature composed of the unified, melded bodies of a man and a woman, having characteristics of both genders and possessed by an eerie alien life form called a "negative spirit" that seeks to "evolve" by this transformation; and the Chief, a paraplegic about whose machinations in bringing the Doom Patrol together the less said the better.

Suitable for ninth grade and up; some harsh language and mature themes; because of the wildly experimental nature of the narrative structure, and the existential philosophies of the plot, this book is appropriate for language arts classes, especially those involved in a comprehensive study of the

comix medium.

27. Dreadstar

Dreadstar: The Price

Jim Starlin

Epic

Vanth Dreadstar is the only survivor of the destruction of the Milky Way galaxy years in the future, and Dreadstar is an early comix short story that depicts his attempt to come to terms with his part in that destruction and make peace with his own soul while on a quiet planet of farmers. The Price is about Syzygy Darklock, a priest who learns the cost of knowledge and the sacrifice necessary for any endeavor of note. Although both Dreadstar and The Price serve in many ways as both epilogue and prologue to longer works by Starlin that aren't compiled, they are beautifully hand-painted and contain solid enough plotting to be enjoyable.

Suitable for ninth grade and up; some violence; light fantasy reading that would be a good supplement to any comix library in language arts classes.

28. Dreamwalker

Jenni Gregory

Dreamwalker Press

This is a wonderful story with a charming female protagonist named Karen Brinson, who discovers, with the aide of her similarly-gifted mentor Mrs. Tobias, that she is a "dreamwalker," a psychic who possesses the ability to "walk"



Figure 12. Karen Brinson's first lesson about the psychic plane and her skills as a Dreamwalker. © 1996 Jenni Gregory

into the dreams of other people. Picture her as a more pleasant and better looking Freddy Krueger. While the lynch pin of the story is Karen's "dreamwalking," the plot itself is more about Karen's day-time life, with all its little disappointments, small triumphs, and hopes for romance and poetry. Gregory is a newcomer to comix, but although her skills as a cartoonist and storyteller are still in the process of evolving, this first effort of hers is quite promising.

Dreamwalker is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mild language; most appropriate for language arts.

29. Dropsie Avenue

Will Eisner

Kitchen Sink Press

In keeping with past themes, Eisner studies the city and its influence on the people who live within it, this time taking as his case-study an entire city block and over two-hundred years of its history. This work is much like Eisner's The Building [see entry 14], but its approach is much more all-encompassing and dynamic. The reader gets to see the generations of people who grow, live, and die within the confines of a city block, and is shown how the nature of the people alter and augment the nature of the neighborhood itself, changing in its ethnicity, its culture, its economic status, and its appearance.

Like the other books in the "Eisner" library [see entries 14, 22, 40, 49, 78, and 85], this one is most

suitable for eighth grade and up; contains some mature themes; appropriate for language arts classes.

30. Elfquest: Fire and Flight

Elfquest: The Forbidden Grove

Elfquest: Captives of Blue Mountain

Elfquest: Quest's End

Wendy and Richard Pini

Kitchen Sink Press

This collection of stories is one of the best-selling fantasy comix on the market. Wendy and her husband have created memorable characters and a convincing fantasy setting in which forest-dwelling elves live, fight, and love amidst the turmoil of a new race of beings: man. This evil-minded race has murdered many of the elves and driven them out of their ancestral dwelling place, and Cutter, the leader of the elves, must lead his people, the Wolfriders, to a new land unpopulated by humans.

This wonderful, involving, simple story is suitable for seventh grade and up; most appropriate for language arts.

31. Enemy Ace: War Idyll

George Pratt

DC Comics

Taking an old National Periodicals (now known as DC Comics) character called Enemy Ace, this modern comix short story about war and survival is a riveting tale of redemption and acceptance. A young journalist tracks down an old, dying

German World War I hero, ostensibly seeking an interview for a running series on famous soldiers who have been awarded medals of honor. What follows is an engrossing conversation between the journalist, Edward Mannock, also a Vietnam War veteran, and Hans von Hammer, the "Enemy Ace" of old who flew biplanes in his own war. This graphic novel, done in beautiful wash and a quiet, contemplative narrative tone, is exceptional for its study of war and the impact it has on the youthful mind, regardless of what war is being examined.

Enemy Ace: War Idyll is suitable for eighth grade and up; some mild language and violence; most appropriate for language arts classes and social studies/history courses.

32. Fax from Sarajevo

Joe Kubert

Dark Horse Press

Along with Will Eisner [see multiple entries throughout this list] Joe Kubert is one of a very few creators in the comix medium who has been producing comix for about half a century. This graphic novel is one of the best books he's done, and is about Kubert's friend Ervin Rustemagic, who is a citizen of Sarajevo struggling to escape that devastated country during the civil war that ravaged it in the early nineties. The narrative is connected together by real-life faxes reproduced and sent off to Kubert and various others while Rustegmagic tried desperately to get himself and his family out of the country and to a safe haven.

This book is suitable for seventh grade and up; some

mild language and mature themes; appropriate for language arts classes and social studies/history courses.

33. Fires

Lorenzo Mattotti

Catalan

I've read very few works in comix that I could truly refer to as "expressionistic" (at least in a literary sense), but Mattotti's Fires qualifies beyond a doubt. The vibrant, bright hues used in this oversized graphic novel give an incredibly vivid (while still dream-like) feel to the book, and the story, a simple one about a military man who stumbles on a paradisaical island, makes the unreal seem real. Anyone who claims that the comix medium isn't filled with potential for experimentation (both narratively and visually) hasn't read this great graphic novel and works like it.

Fires is suitable for eighth grade and up; some mature themes; appropriate for language arts and possibly social science as a visual examination of war.

34. Flood: A Novel in Pictures

Eric Drooker

Four Walls Eight Windows

Similar in structure to Peter Kuper's The System [see entry 81], this almost wordless novel is done mostly in gorgeous scratch board graphics and tells the story of one man living in the city. The story is complete while concise, comprehensible while complex, beautiful and ugly at the same



Figure 13. A unique vision of the subways as seen in the wordless and dream-like Flood. © Eric Drooker

time. Drooker manages to move from the painfully real to the eerily fantastic flawlessly with his pictorial narrative, and the work is one of the few examples of a "silent comix book" that is successful as a story.

Flood is suitable for eighth grade and up; some mature themes and visuals; appropriate for language arts classes.

35. Frank in the River

Jim Woodring

Fantagraphics

Frank is the anthropomorphic creature created by Woodring as a "sounding board" for his own subconscious. Many of these collected short stories are in dazzling color, and most of them are completely silent, allowing for a very dream-like series of vignettes that paint a visual and narrative picture of the realms of the bizarre. These stories, while not necessarily high comix literature, are notable for their excellent use of panel-to-panel storytelling and are ripe for interpretation and philosophical discussion.

Some of the animal-like denizens of Frank's world are depicted with barely perceptible genitalia, which may give some teachers pause, but these stories are most suitable for ninth grade and up, regardless; appropriate for language arts classes.

36. Greenberg the Vampire

J.M. DeMatteis and Mark Badger

Marvel

This comix story depicts the life of Oscar Greenberg, a reluctant Jewish vampire. Although resigned to the life of the undead, Oscar nonetheless does his best to assimilate into mainstream America, trying to keep up family relations with his mother and father, attempting to uphold his professional obligations as a writer, and doing his best to stay sane in a world that seems anything but sane. Although inconsistent in places, this short graphic novel is an enjoyable twist on the genre of vampires.

This comix work contains some harsh language, nudity, and adult themes, but all of these are dealt with in a fairly humorous and even innocuous manner; suitable for tenth grade and up; most appropriate as a supplementary addition to a language arts library.

37. Groo the Wanderer

Sergio Aragones and Mark Evanier

Epic Comics

Groo is a medieval barbarian, much in the tradition of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Conan and others. The chief difference is that Aragones and Evanier take their creation as anything but seriously, choosing instead to use the sword-and-sorcery genre in a decidedly humorous vein. These stories are wonderfully light-hearted in approach, exposing the every-day silliness of life and the commonplace foibles of humanity.

Groo is suitable for all ages, but the satire and

tongue-in-cheek humor would be best understood by eighth graders and up; appropriate for language arts and social studies classes.

Note: If you recognize Aragones' indelible drawing style, you've probably seen his cartooning in the "page border" silent comic strips carried in Mad magazine for years.

38. House of Java

Mark Murphy

ComicsLit/NBM

This is a promising collection of short stories by newcomer Mark Murphy. Most of the stories are set within the confines of a coffee shop, and is the character study of a number of people who frequent it. The comix in this collection could easily be pseudo-hip, flat stories that will become out-of-date as soon as the current fashion of hanging out at coffee shops becomes unfashionable, but, instead, they are involving tales of quiet reflection with sharp dialogue and memorable moments.

Read through all of these stories, since some contain scenes and themes that may be considered too adult for adolescents; some are quite tame and suitable for ninth grade and up, however; appropriate for language arts classes.

39. Hearts of Africa: Volume I

Hearts of Africa: Volume II

Cindy Goff, Rafael Nieves, and Seitu Hayden



Figure 14. One man's frustration and barely tolerated rant about coffee from House of Java. © 1998 Mark Murphy

Slave Labor Graphics

Tales from the Heart is one of my favorite comic books, and these two collections compile the first half-dozen issues of the series. The story is semi-autobiographical and recounts the experiences of Cathy, who leaves her quiet suburban home to join the peace corps in Central Africa. The story has absolutely no pretense whatsoever, and it rings resoundingly honest in both its depictions of young Cathy, as well as its portrayal of her fellow Peace Corps members and the native people of Central Africa.

Hearts of Africa is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts and social studies courses.

40. Invisible People

Will Eisner

Kitchen Sink Press

In this shorter offering by a venerable comix master [see entries 14, 22, 29, 49, 78, and 85], three anonymous people living in the city are examined in detail, revealing lives that are poignant, tragic, unique, and sobering. The first story is about a man named Pincus Pleatnik, who suddenly finds himself without an identity one morning. The second story is about a drifter named Morris who possesses the uncanny ability to heal others. And the third story (the best of the three) is about Herman, a 50 year old bachelor, his mother, and a lonely single woman searching for a mate. These three stories, when taken together, add up to a complex



Figure 15. One woman's sacrifice as shown in Invisible People: Mortal Combat. © 1992 Will Eisner

web of emotion-stirring comix storytelling.

This graphic novel is suitable for seventh grade and up; contains some mature themes; appropriate for language arts.

41. I Can't Tell You Anything and Other Stories

Michael Dougan

Penguin

Dougan walks the line between typical cartoony exaggeration and out-and-out heart-breaking realism in these 17 short stories. His subjects also run the gamut--from international playboys to big-haired shysters to wild chickens. My personal favorite among these gems is "Black Cherry," which actually managed to bring a tear to these cynical eyes. It's a story about an old man who comes into an ice cream shop every day to order a "black cherry" ice cream cone, and his lonely, isolated existence.

Pick and choose among the various offerings in these great collection of short stories. Some are suitable for all ages, some contain harsh language and mature themes; the more innocuous stories are appropriate for seventh grade and up in language arts classes.

42. I Never Liked You

Chester Brown

Drawn and Quarterly

This is absolutely the best story about adolescence and young adulthood I've ever read in comix, and ranks among the best I've read or seen in any storytelling medium. This is a

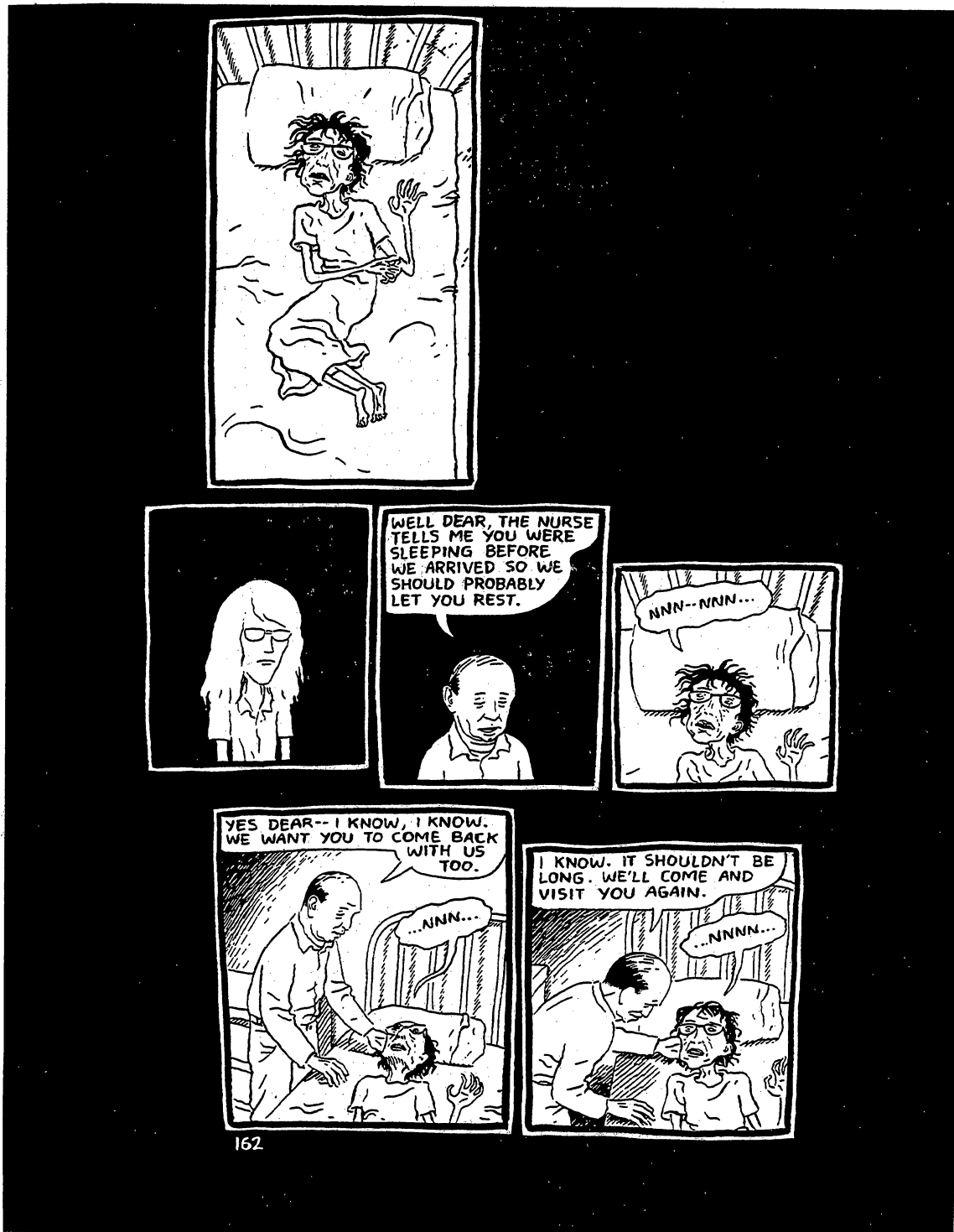


Figure 16. Chester Brown visits his mother in the mental hospital in I Never Liked You. © 1994 Chester Brown

thinly veiled autobiography about Brown's own adolescence and his first awkward steps into the adult world. The story is told in a minimalist line and a black background, suggesting the simplicity of youth and, perhaps, the sometimes stark emptiness of it as well. The tale is made powerful as much by what goes untold as what is actually revealed throughout the plot. Young Chester's family life is intrinsic to the story, but peripheral as well, reflecting the emotional state and attitude of many teens where family is concerned. The bulk of I Never Liked You concerns Brown's fragmentary relationship with the women of the story, including a young girl who has a crush on him, an older girl who is the closest thing to a friend Chester has, a raven-haired classmate who Chester has fallen in love with, and his mother, who becomes ill later on in the tale.

This graphic novel is one of the best the medium has to offer to date, but due to the inclusion of harsh language (the word "fuck" is absolutely intrinsic to the plot of the novel and the characterization of Chester, and was, in fact, the original title to the work) it would be best to offer this book to students in high school in advanced literary courses. It would be a shame to make this go unread by young adults until college. Brown is one of the best artists working in his field and he deserves to be examined.

43. Jar of Fools, Part I

Jar of Fools, Part II

Jason Lutes

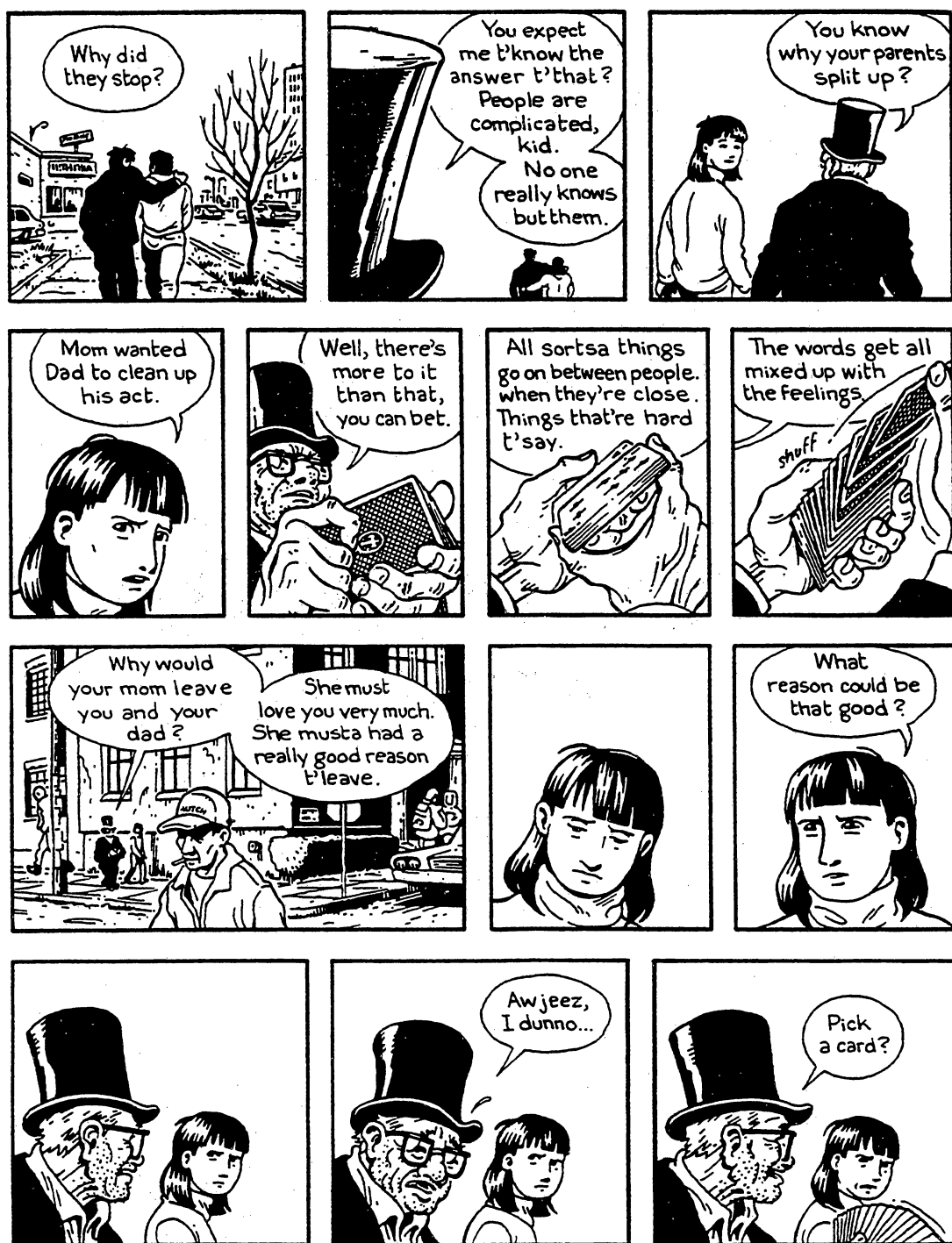


Figure 17. An attempt to answer the question: "Why do people stop loving?" from Jar of Fools. © 1995 Jason Lutes

Black Eye Press

These two volumes comprise a comix novella about the relationships between an out-of-luck stage magician and his aging mentor, the magician and his girlfriend, and a sleezy con-man and his daughter. This is one of those books that is, unfortunately, still rare in the medium of comix (relative to prose or film or plays): a simple, moving piece of fiction about very real characters, without the trappings of genre conventions. Anyone genuinely interested in reading something truly literate and exceptionally drawn should read Jar of Fools. And any teacher genuinely interested in exposing their students to comix as literature would be doing them a disservice in not offering up this marvelous book.

Jar of Fools is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mature themes and mild language; appropriate for language arts classes.

44. Journey: The Adventures of Wolverine MacAlistaire

William Messner-Loebs

Fantagraphics

Although fiction, this work tells an historically accurate tale of frontier life in nineteenth century America through the eyes of one man: trapper "Wolverine" MacAlistaire. This is an engaging tale that weaves historical fact with historical fiction and presents a story filled to the brim with a memorable cast of characters and unforgettable events. Messner-Loebs draws his characters with a loose, thick line, and his storytelling is similarly

styled. In this book you'll meet real-life political figures walking alongside fictional characters so well-rounded that it's hard to tell the difference, and the story itself is so rich and multi-faceted that it reveals far more about the human condition than any "mere" historical text could ever hope to.

Journey is suitable for all ages, but the complex social fabric of the story may be better suited to high school students ninth grade and up; appropriate for language arts and social studies/history courses.

45. The Kents

John Ostrander, Timothy Truman and Tom Mandrake

DC Comics

This is an exceptional piece of historical fiction set in Civil War era America. Don't let the big "S" on the cover fool you; although the gimmick of this book is that many of the characters are ancestors of Superman's adoptive parents, John and Martha Kent (hence the title The Kents) there's not a cape or leotard to be found in the book. Instead, the reader is offered a good, solid story of characters engaged in a struggle between freedom and oppression. The Civil War in this book is the catalyst to death and destruction, not only on the war front (which is still brewing at the time of this tale) but among family and neighbors, moneyed and poor, lovers and friends and leaders of state. Like Journey [see entry 44] this tale mixes real-life historical figures and places with fictionalized characters and settings to create a

fabric of reality that is both complex and compelling.

This book is suitable for all ages, seventh and up, although readers may find it a bit drier than works like Journey; appropriate for language arts and social studies classes.

46. Kingdom Come

Mark Waid and Alex Ross

DC Comics

Although this comix novel is all about superheroes, it is more about gods and mythology. In it the reader finds very familiar faces, like those of Superman and Batman and Wonder Woman and Aquaman. The setting of the story is some years into the future, and the classical gods (read: the Golden Age superheroes) have more or less abandoned earth to itself. Superman, after failing to halt the detonation of a nuclear bomb in the heart of Kansas, has sequestered himself away to become a simple farmer; Batman, his body supported by an exoskeleton after the years of abuse it suffered, patrols the streets of Gotham from his Bat Cave, monitoring the actions of heavily armored troops under his command; Wonder Woman lives a quiet life of seclusion on Paradise Island after being stripped of her royalty and heritage after being deemed a failure by her fellow Amazons in her mission to bring about peace to the world; and Aquaman lives in perpetual sea-dark twilight, choosing to rule in Atlantis and govern the seven seas rather than attempt to live among the land dwellers of his dual ancestry. The story revolves around these original

Golden Age characters, Titans if you will, coming back to the world to avert the disaster of new gods, upstart gods, and their plague of violence and battle thrust upon mankind. A real highlight of this book is Alex Ross' incredible hand-painted artwork, which one has to see to believe [see also Marvels, entry 58, for more great art by Ross].

This book is suitable for all ages, but would be best suited to eighth grade and up due to its mature and complex themes; not a simple superhero story; some violence; most appropriate for language arts classes, especially those engaged in a study of myth.

47. Kings in Disguise

James Vance and Dan Burr

Kitchen Sink Press

This tale is a straightforward coming of age story, set in depression-era America, in which a 12-year old boy sets out across the country in search of his father. Although it has few surprises, its rock-solid storytelling (accompanied by equally predictable but solid art) makes it a really enjoyable read. Like other pieces of historical fiction offered in this list [see entries 45, 59, etc.] this would be a useful book to utilize in cross-curricular classes. The plot is sometimes very disturbing, dealing as it does with the complex adult world that this young man finds himself in, filled with very human monsters, depraved derelicts, and sufferers of poverty whose actions are directed as much by survival as morality.

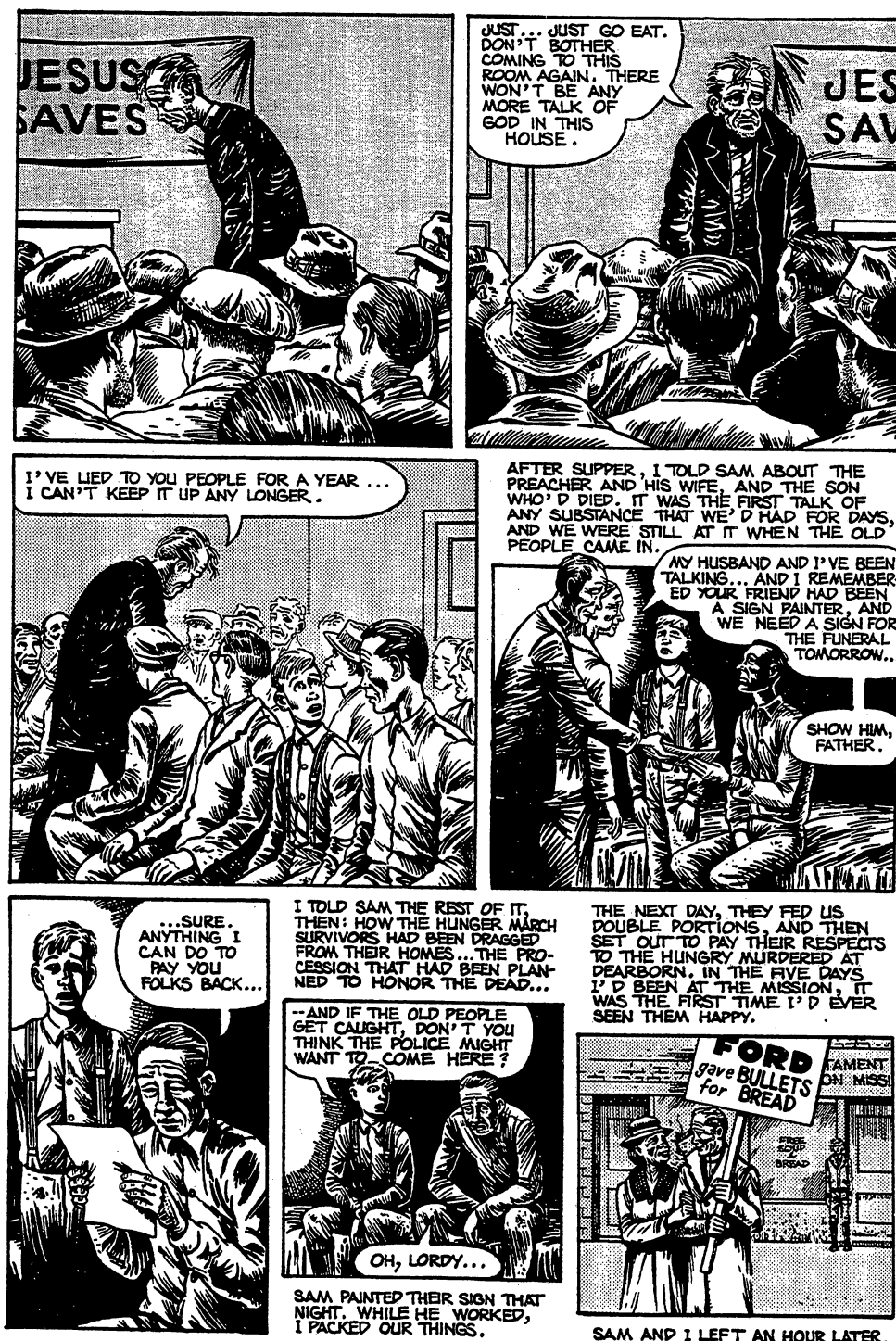


Figure 18. A minister loses faith after learning that his son is dead in Kings in Disguise. © 1990 James Vance and Dan Burr

This book contains some mature themes, and is most suitable for eighth grade and up; appropriate for language arts classes and social studies courses.

48. Leave it to Chance

James Robinson and Paul Smith

Homage Comics

This book is a delightful fantasy richly illustrated with simple color drawings, fast-paced with quick dialogue, and packed with fun characters. The main protagonist is teenager Chance Falconer, the daughter of Lucas Falconer, who is the guardian and magician of Devil's Echo, a city much like any modern city in America except for the fact that it seems to be plagued with very real hauntings, demonic possessions, and any number of recurring magical threats. Anyone who thinks comic books are "just for boys" (a very legitimate accusation some years ago) hasn't read books like Leave it to Chance. The story centers around Chance and her attempts to involve herself in her father's life, both personally and professionally. Chance's mother died some years ago, and Chance's father is old fashioned, unwilling at times to concede to the reality that his daughter is able to carry on the traditions and name of her father as much as any son could. The stories are fun, the characters are three-dimensional, and the themes are both modern and traditional in their attempt to teach the basic philosophies of filial love and growing up.

This book is suitable for all ages, fifth grade and up,

but may be more enjoyable for pre-high school age young adults; appropriate for language arts classes.

49. A Life Force

Will Eisner

Kitchen Sink Press

This is quite possibly the best work by Eisner, A Contract with God [see entry 22] being the only book that even comes close to the level of thematic complexity and profound characterization this graphic novel possesses. The plot involves an extensive cast of characters set in the depression-era Dropsie Avenue neighborhood utilized throughout many of Eisner's novels [see Dropsie Avenue, entry 29, and To the Heart of the Storm, entry 85] and delves into one of the most important questions in life and literature: what is a good reason for living? Although no concrete answers are forthcoming in this daring work, some hopeful optimism about the question is offered through the complex relationships of the myriad inhabitants of the city and the unexpected philosophies derived from the life of a cockroach.

This book is suitable for eighth grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; appropriate for language arts classes and essential as part of a comix library.

50. Lone Wolf and Cub

Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima

First Comics

This manga from Japan, like Barefoot Gen and Adolf [see entries 1 and 6] is very fast-paced and cinematic in its



Figure 19. Unexpected divorce during the depression amid the metaphysical ponderings of A Life Force. © 1988 Will Eisner

storytelling and visual approach. It tells the story of a samurai who wanders the countryside of Japan with his toddler son after the death of his wife. Anyone interested in an authentic exploration of Japanese history and philosophy would do well to pick this up. Any teacher involved in the study of Japan (as I know many middle schools are) or interested in Asian literature should offer this to their students as supplementary reading.

This book is suitable for seventh grade and up; some violence; some mature themes; appropriate for language arts classes and social studies courses.

51. Longshot Comics: The Long and Unlearned Life of Roland Gethers

Longshot Comics: The Failed Promise of Bradley Gethers

Shane Simmons

Slave Labor Graphics

These two slim 24-page comix are actually quite lengthy reads. The first story boasts that it spans "eighty-nine years in the British Empire" with "dozens of supporting characters, hundreds of bit players, and thousands of superfluous no-line extras." The second story is similar, covering the life of the son of Roland Gethers, Bradley, spanning "another seventy-three years in the British Empire (and colonies past and present)." These comix are composed of three thousand, eight hundred and forty panels each, all of them half-square inch boxes with little dots representing the characters. These two stories possess some of the most

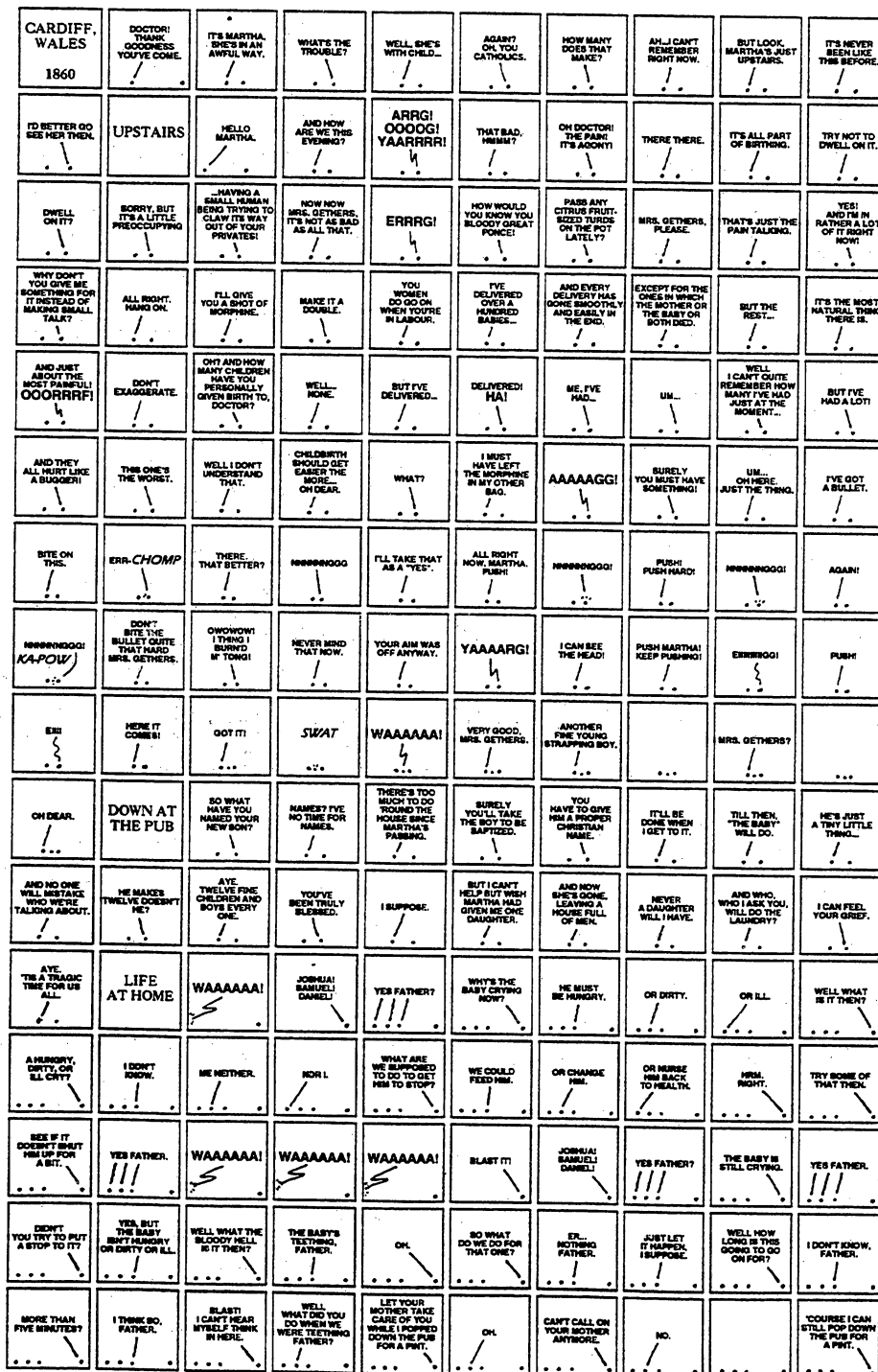


Figure 20. Very very small print and dots for characters, the trademark style of Longshot Comics. © 1995 Shane Simmons

genuinely funny dialogue I've ever read in comix, and the satire, sometimes subtle, sometimes hilariously over-the-top, offers everything that great satire should: real and laughter-inducing criticism of social conventions and human foibles.

These two comix works are deceptively simple in form, but incredibly complex and involving in structure; most suitable for seventh grade and up; appropriate for language arts and social studies.

52. Los Tejanos

Jack Jackson

Fantagraphics

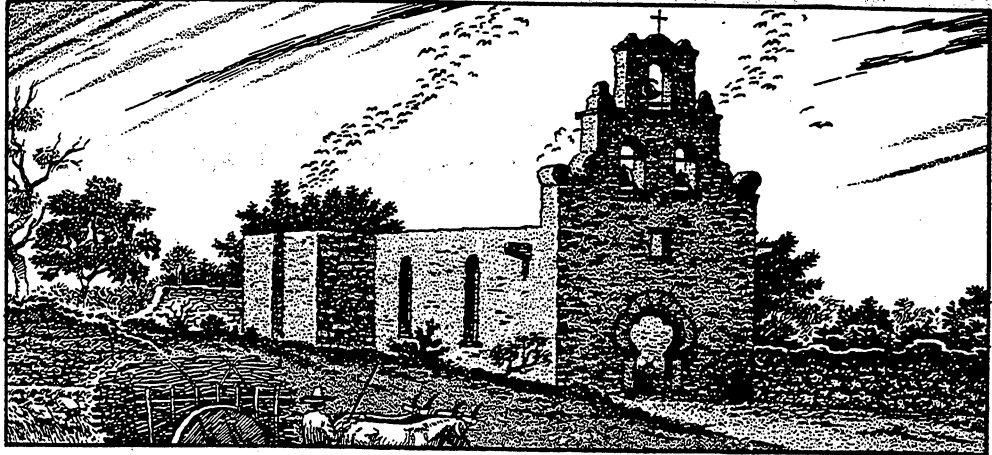
This is the story of Juan N. Seguin, an important leader and riveting figure among the Texas-Americans during the rise of the Lone Star State. Jack Jackson's preoccupation with and passion for Texas history and western figures of the past really shows through in his comix work to date [see also Comanche Moon, entry 20]. His research and study is meticulous, and his drawings are so authentic, so filled with lovely and communicative detail, that one can spend hours simply looking at his artwork and be absorbed by the visual display of Texas' past. However, the text of his work is just as informed as his illustrations, and any teacher interested in bringing into their classroom truly inspired works in the field of history and biography should check out the work of Jack Jackson.

This book is most suitable for eighth grade and up; some

FURTHER DOWN THE RIVER LIE THE PROUD MISSIONS — ONCE A MAJOR INSTRUMENT
IN SPREADING SPANISH CULTURE, IN CIVILIZING THE LOCAL INDIAN TRIBES.



NOW THEY ARE ABANDONED AND RAPIDLY FALLING INTO RUIN, HOME ONLY TO MYRIAD BATS AND SMALL SCURRYING CREATURES.



BUT A FEW HUMAN RESIDENTS, MOSTLY DESCENDANTS OF THE EARLY INDIAN NEOPHYTES, STILL REMAIN, AS IF
CLINGING TO THE TATTERED SKIRTS OF THE GRAND DREAM THAT THE PAPAL FATHERS LEFT BEHIND...

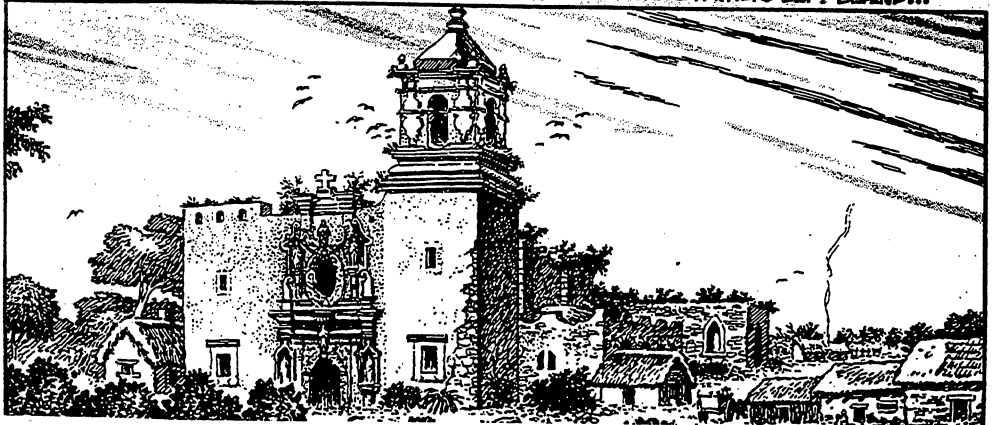


Figure 21. A gorgeously rendered examination of the Texan
landscape in Los Tejanos. © 1982 Jack Jackson

mature and complex documentary information; most appropriate for language arts and social studies.

53. Love and Rockets: Chelo's Burden

Gilbert Hernandez

Love and Rockets: The Death of Speedy

Jaime Hernandez

Fantagraphics

These two brothers from Oxnard, California do some of the most inspired and literate comix to be found in the field of ethnic fiction. Jaime does stories primarily about the L.A. barrio scene, and Gilbert writes mainly about a fictional small town south of the border called Palomar. These stories are so rife with wonderful characterization and excellent storytelling and beautiful art that it would be criminal to miss them. There are over a dozen other volumes that include other work by these artists, but the two represented here are some of their better stories. Heartbreak Soup and other short stories by Gilbert in Chelo's Burden show how the quiet, traditional Spanish town of Palomar functions on the borders of the modern world. Jaime's story is set in an L.A. barrio called "Hoppers 13" by its residents and relates the story of youth culture in the Spanish ghetto, revealing the violence, ignorance, bliss and delight to be found there.

Both Gilbert and Jaime's comix have harsh language, some nudity, and sexual situations that are core to the subject matter and intrinsic to the plots and characters of



Figure 22. A brief introduction to three characters from Love and Rockets: Chelo's Burden. © 1985 Gilbert Hernandez

their stories; most appropriate for high school upper grades in language arts and ethnic literature studies courses.

Note: The Hernandez brothers' work can be "edited" quite easily if being taught within a community less receptive to its "spicier" aspects; indeed, Jaime and Gilbert themselves have told me they don't mind that at all, as long as their works get read.

54. Madman

Michael Allred

Kitchen Sink Press

If your tastes run to the truly eclectic and zany, this book is for you. It relates the whacky adventures of "Frank," a modern Frankenstein creature for the absurd and loony end of the 20th century. "Frank" is a hideously scarred man brought back from the dead with little sense of identity and a garbled wit and ineffable charm worthy of Charlie Brown. The supporting cast of characters include Dr. Flem, "Madman's" unwilling and distracted mentor. This is whimsical fantasy coupled with a mystery story layered with science fiction and philosophy.

Madman is suitable for fifth grade and up; some mature themes and mild violence; most appropriate for language arts classes.

55. Mage, the Hero Discovered: Volume I

Mage, the Hero Discovered: Volume II

Mage, the Hero Discovered: Volume III

Matt Wagner

Starblaze

This is some of the earliest work from Matt Wagner, and the simple, almost manga-esque linework coupled with some nice airbrushed color really make this a visual treat. The story is about a young man named Kevin Matchstick who discovers that he has the soul of a hero. This is a fantasy genre piece, but takes some delightful post-modern twists and turns along the way. Wagner has ventured into more adult storytelling in recent years, but few newer comix of his can compare to this fledgling story that mixes magic and myth and the modern world so well.

Mage is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mild language; most appropriate as supplementary reading in language arts.

56. The Magic Flute

P. Craig Russell

Eclipse

Besides being beautiful to look at (P. Craig Russell has some of the most gorgeously intricate feathered linework this side of Charles Vess), this comic book is an actual, faithful adaptation of an honest-to-goodness opera. Somehow, Russell's love and passion for opera comes alive on the page, and his illustrations almost seem musical. I've included very few adaptations from other storytelling media in this list [see entry 19], but Russell has created something truly new here in this illustratively musical comix book.

The Magic Flute, like other, shorter opera adaptations

of Russel's [see, for example, entry 67], is suitable for all ages, fifth grade and up; most appropriate for language arts classes and music courses.

57. Marilyn: The Story of a Woman

Kathryn Hyatt

Seven Stories Press

There are so few biography comix out there, especially those about 20th century figures. This lengthy graphic novel explores the story of a starlet without glitz or undue focus on the glamor that was Marilyn Monroe's life, with particular attention paid to her sad teenage years. The reader experiences her life through her eyes and her voice as she talks to her psychoanalyst, a reporter, and to herself as well.

This book contains some mature themes; most suitable for eighth grade and up; appropriate for language arts and social studies/history courses.

58. Marvels

Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross

Marvel

This graphic novel is not art, says Art Spiegelman, creator of Maus [see entry 59], and I'd agree. It is fun, however. Busiek and Ross reweave the history of the Marvel universe, populated with such memorable pop-culture characters as Spiderman, the Hulk, the Fantastic Four, and the X-men, and do it with a great deal of affection for these



Figure 23. Young Norma Jeane receives confusing information in Marilyn: The Story of a Woman. © 1996 Kathryn Hyatt

beloved characters that sprang from the brows of Steve Ditko, Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, etc. The entire narrative is filtered through the eyes of a nondescript journalist, who serves as the "everyman" of this tale of "marvels" who exist in a New York very much like our own, but different as well. Ross' painted artwork, like that in Kingdom Come [see entry 46], is simply too beautiful to believe, and is one of the highlights to this very entertaining take on old characters.

This book is suitable for all ages, sixth grade and up; appropriate in language arts classes, especially as part of a mythology unit.

59. Maus, A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History

Maus, A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began

Art Spiegelman

Pantheon

This is the first comix work to receive the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The book runs the gamut from autobiography to biography to historical fiction, and is, without a doubt, one of the best graphic novels I've ever read. It is the 300-plus page story of Vladek Spiegelman, the father of the author, who is a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps of World War II. The tale moves in and out from the present-time relationship of Art Spiegelman with his father to the past travails of Vladek in the face of the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Poland. It's one of the most moving stories pertaining to its subject matter that I've ever read, and is a deceptively simple tale that functions narratively in a



Figure 24. Ever the cynic and pragmatist, Artie's father tells it like it is in Maus. © 1986 Art Spiegelman

very complex manner to relate an important tale of human suffering, compassion, and survival. Maus is one of the few comix to get any real critical attention, and a forum for its study in the public schools should become available. It could easily be used in a social studies class alongside such works as The Diary of Anne Frank during a study of the Holocaust in eighth grade.

Maus is most suitable for eighth grade and up, and is comprehensible and meaningful and rich for younger and older readers in a way very few novels are. It could be taught in the middle or secondary schools in languages arts classes or even social studies, and incorporated into these curriculums quite easily.

Note: this graphic novel has been taught by me in the Long Beach Unified School District and was extremely well-received by students, administration, and parents alike.

60. Miracleman: A Dream of Flying

Alan Moore, Gary Leech and Alan Davis

Miracleman: The Red King Syndrome

Alan Moore, Alan Davis, Chuck Beckum, and Rick Veitch

Miracleman: Olympus

Alan Moore and John Tottleben

Miracleman: The Golden Age

Neil Gaiman and Mark Buckingham

Eclipse

This is one of the best "Superman as myth" stories I've ever encountered. What if a Superman really did what he's

supposed to do and "saved the world?" These four volumes attempt to answer that question, and do so with a great deal of humanity and pathos. The first three volumes, written by Alan Moore, one of the comix medium's best writers [see entries 80, 91, and 96] relate the story of Michael Moran, a middle-aged freelance journalist who is plagued by migraines and recurring dreams of himself as some kind of costumed superhero. Through a number of interesting twists and turns, Michael is transformed into a god-like being of incredible power, and then proceeds to transform the world around him into a paradise straight out of the most utopian literature. The last volume, entitled The Golden Age, and written by Neil Gaiman [see entries 24, 72, etc.] attempts to answer the question: what would humanity do with paradise? This is a thinking person's fantasy, and not for young children.

These four volumes contain harsh language, realistic violence, and mature themes; most suitable for higher grades in high school, tenth grade and up; especially appropriate for those language arts classes studying the more complex nature of comix narrative.

61. Moonshadow

J.M. DeMatteis and Jon J. Muth

Epic

This fantasy about a boy kidnapped by a race of beings whose motives are the embodiment of the arbitrary is wonderfully written by DeMatteis, who seems to have equal interest in existential philosophy, oriental and occidental

metaphysics, scatology, and fantasy. This is one of the most honest coming-of-age stories I've ever read, and Muth's painterly, water-color approach to the artwork is truly inspired.

Suitable for eighth grade and up; some mature themes and some mild language; most appropriate for language arts classes.

62. The Most Important Thing and Other Stories

Graham Chaffee

Fantagraphics Books

This collection of shorter stories by the author of The Big Wheels [see entry 11] is a stellar example of the kind of work that so very few people outside the relatively small community of committed comix readers are aware of. The first story is a short musing on the mornings of two different women who then meet in a coffee shop as customer and waitress. Subsequent stories involve a group of young boys and their preoccupation with urban legends; the silent war-time recollections of an old man in a park; and the title story, which is a disquieting philosophical dissertation about life through the mouths of cats and dogs.

These stories are suitable for seventh grade and up; one has some mild language; appropriate for language arts.

63. Mr. Punch

Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean

DC Comics

This is an incredibly complex comix story, both

narratively and visually. The plot revolves around the mystery of families and the Punch and Judy show. The reader gets to meet the kind of bizarre relatives that every family has and most families hide. The pictures by McKean are eclectic and amazing, utilizing techniques from simple pen and ink drawings to collage to oils. Like Gaiman and McKean's earlier collaboration, Violent Cases [see entry 93], this comix novel has as its center of interest the way that families and stories and youth all intersect to shape who we are and who we eventually become.

This book is suitable for eighth grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts.

64. Murmur

Lorenzo Mattotti and Jerry Kramsky

Penguin

Since the advent of Neil Gaiman's Sandman [see entry 73], stories about dreams seemed to proliferate comix for quite some time. However, I've never felt as though I was inside someone else's dream as much as I did while reading Mattotti and Kramsky's Murmur. The story flows beautifully from dream-like sequence to dream-like sequence, and the shapes and colors transport you far away. The story is even more ethereal and as open to interpretation as Mattotti's other comix work, Fires [see entry 33].

This book is suitable for eighth grade and up; some mature themes; most appropriate for language arts class and

art classes.

65. The New Adventures of Abraham Lincoln

Scott McCloud

Homage Comics

This graphic novel by the author of Zot [see entry 100] was done entirely on computer, and the result is quite enjoyable. The plot is one which mixes politics, history, biography, and adolescent hijinks in a fun mishmash of unique comix storytelling. The narrative involves the sudden appearance of an ever-smiling Abe Lincoln, apparently back from the grave and in a perpetual state of propaganda-spouting, eye-twinkling political commercialism. It turns out that this unblemished, shining paragon of virtue from the past is not who he seems when the real Abe Lincoln shows up, with accompanying digestive problems, receding hair line, acne problems, and stammering (but trustworthy) honesty.

Suitable for fifth grade and up; some complex themes and satire that may go over the heads of pre-high schoolers; most appropriate for social studies and history courses.

66. New York, New York

Peter Kuper

Fantagraphics

Peter Kuper is one of those comix artists with a decidedly (and all-too-rare) unique "voice." His disturbing, angular drawings facilitate the perfect style to tell stories about the city. These stories range from autobiography to

more grim fictional pieces that are hard-edged and cutting, exposing the sprawling urban arena for what it is or can be [see also Kuper's The System, entry 81, for an even more subtle reworking of these themes].

Many of the stories are most suitable for eighth grade and up; some mild language; some mature themes and satire; most appropriate for language arts.

Note: this collection of short stories is fairly varied in terms of maturity and grade-appropriateness. As with other similar collections [such as entries 35 and 38], one should pick and choose which stories are most suitable for their class.

67. Opera

P. Craig Russell

Eclipse

As with his other book, The Magic Flute [see entry 56], Russell does a wonderful job of adapting real operas to comix. Unlike that other book, though, this is a selection of shorter pieces. I'm not a big fan of opera, but I have to say that Russell's drawings make me hear music when I look at them.

Russell's work is suitable for all ages; this and Russell's other book could make for great supplementary reading in language arts classes and music courses.

68. Our Cancer Year

Harvey Pekar, Joyce Brabner and Frank Stack

Four Walls Eight Windows

Harvey Pekar is the cantankerous protagonist and author of the autobiographical series of short stories contained in the American Splendor books [see entry 3]. In this more deeply personal graphic novel, Harvey is diagnosed with cancer. Harvey survives the frightening ordeal of chemotherapy, radiation treatments, hair loss, and debilitating illness by the end of the story (written with his wife Joyce), but what makes this book so refreshing and overwhelmingly life-affirming for me is that Harvey doesn't try to portray himself as a hero. He survives, but, like many of us, he whines, moans, worries, and swears every step along the path to recovery. The illustrations and visual storytelling of old-time underground cartoonist (and current university art professor) Frank Stack are beautifully understated and relaxed.

This comix work is suitable for ninth grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts.

69. Palestine, A Nation Occupied: Part I

Palestine, A Nation Occupied: Part II

Joe Sacco

Fantagraphics

This is real, honest-to-goodness travelogue storytelling. I don't think I've ever encountered something in this genre in comix with the kind of depth and sincerity that Joe Sacco's managed to attain in these two volumes.



Figure 25. A "break" from serious journalism for a young cartoonist in Palestine. © 1993 Joe Sacco

Sacco travels throughout Israeli-occupied Palestine, and, although he leans towards Palestinian sympathizing, he manages to paint a truly human picture of what it's like to live there as both an Israeli and as a Palistinian. This isn't slice-of-life autobiography. This isn't journalism. But it's an amazing amalgam of both that hasn't really been seen in comix that much. And the use of hatching and stippling in his black-and-white artwork almost seems to communicate color!

This book is most suitable for ninth grade and up; some harsh language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts and social studies courses.

70. Road to Perdition

Max Allan Collins and Richard Piers Rayner

Paradox Press

In line with themes explored in Lone Wolf and Cub [see entry 50] Road to Perdition is about the relationship of Michael O'Sullivan, the "angel of death," Al Capone's most feared and fearsome hitman, with his eight year old son. It is both crime fiction and an excellent mystery as well. The setting is wonderfully rendered in both words and pictures by Collins and Rayner, with authenticity dripping off the pages, but the real pearl of this book is the relationship between O'Sullivan and his son, shown to the reader as they spend months on the road after the eight year old boy accidentally witnesses a murder.

This book contains violence and some mature themes; most

suitable for ninth grade and up; appropriate for language arts classes and, possibly, social studies/history courses.

71. The Rocketeer

Dave Stevens

Eclipse

Dave Stevens spins a wonderfully nostalgic tale that brings 1930's America to life and recalls the innocuous pleasure of a nickel day at the movies. This slim volume tells the story of a young man who stumbles upon a rocket pack that, when strapped to his back, enables him to fly, fight Nazi saboteurs and impress the chicks. Stevens' comix are beautifully rendered and in many ways evocative of old 1930's and '40's pin-up art or '50's Life magazine covers.

This book, really more of a short story, is suitable for all ages, fifth grade and up; some violence; most appropriate as a supplementary addition to a language arts library.

Note: This comix work was adapted to film by Touchstone pictures back in the late eighties.

72. Rubber Blanket: Big Man

David Mazzucchelli

Rubber Blanket Press

"Big Man" is just one of the beautiful shorter stories by David Mazzucchelli, artist of Batman: Year One [see entry 7] and Daredevil: Born Again [see entry 23] in this beautifully rendered and poignant set of modern folk tales. This particular story revolves around the initial discovery



Figure 26. Peter wonders aloud about reality and its true nature in The Big Man. © 1991 David Mazzucchelli.

by some children of a giant man found tied down to a crudely constructed raft near the shores of a small coastal town. The large man is unconscious, but soon, after the arrival of some adults and being placed in a barn, he revives, appearing to be mute and of simple intelligence. Within a short period of careful scrutiny by the townspeople, the huge man becomes a tentative part of the community and begins helping with chores befitting his size and proportionate strength. He pulls young trees from their roots and transplants them to nearby groves; he helps plough the land like a bi-pedal ox; he even saves the life of a neighboring farmer who's trapped underneath a tipped tractor. Throughout the story, the relationship of The Big Man (as he's dubbed) and various characters is explored, including the friendship that develops between him and a young, mentally retarded girl. The story is incredibly complex and yet also eerily quiet, subtly examining the nature of friendship and the dual-edged sword of fear (which inspires both grudging respect and simmering resentment).

"Big Man" is suitable for seventh grade and up; some of Mazzucchelli's other stories are suitable for various ages and grade levels. Read them and pick and choose what would be best for your class; appropriate for language arts classes, especially those engaged in a study of folk tales.

73. Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes

Sandman: The Dolls House

Sandman: Dream County

Sandman: Season of Mists

Sandman: Fables and Reflections

Sandman: A Game of You

Sandman: Brief Lives

Sandman: Worlds End

Sandman: The Kindly Ones

Sandman: The Wake

Neil Gaiman and Various

Vertigo

How many authors can boast of creating a fully realized myth? How many writers can say that their works of fantasy border on religion and resonate with the same power as ancient beliefs? Neil Gaiman can. In an ambitious extended comix novel of over 1800 pages, this young English writer creates The Endless, gods who are not gods, but govern various aspects of the human condition. More than that, he creates a fully (dis)functional family: there's Destiny, the blind eldest brother; Death, his younger, happy-go-lucky sister; Dream, the title character and Lord of the Unconscious; Destruction, who disappeared hundreds of years ago; Desire and Despair, twin siblings and dark reflections of each other; and Delirium, the youngest sister, who used to be known as Delight. This long comix work tells the tale of this family, and focuses on Dream himself, the Sandman, as he learns about himself and how important humanity is--even his own.

This series of novels is suitable for eighth grade and up; some stories have mild language and mature themes; most

appropriate for language arts.

74. Signal to Noise

Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean

VG Graphics

This is a short story about a dying film maker creating his last movie inside his mind as his health slowly deteriorates. While cancer ravages his body, he composes a story about a small village in Rome on December 31st, 999 a.d. as the populace waits for the apocalypse. This comix work strives to say much in a very few number of pages, and succeeds for the most part, raising questions on the subjects of religion, god, power, redemption, and the end of the world that happens every day. This graphic novel is from the same collaborative team as Mr. Punch [see entry 63] and Violent Cases [see entry 93] and is a very powerful, contemplative tale about mortality and living forever.

Signal to Noise is suitable for eighth grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts.

75. Skeleton Key: Book 1

Skeleton Key: Book 2

Skeleton Key: Book 3

Andi Watson

Amaze Ink

Similar in concept to Zot [see entry 100] but entirely unique in execution, this fun story explores a unique cast of

characters which includes a young girl in the throes of puberty, her anthropomorphized Japanese fox companion, and a host of witches and bad guys out to get them both after a key comes into the young girl's possession which, when placed into any keyhole in any door, opens said door to strange worlds and places and times. The story is as much about growing up as it is about the fantasy backdrop, however.

This set of stories contains some mild language and mature themes; suitable for ninth grade and up; most appropriate as a supplementary addition to a language arts library.

77. Skizz

Alan Moore and Jim Baikie

Titan Books

This is one of Moore's earliest examples of comix writing, and, although the plot runs in a slightly similar vein as E.T. (this comix novella predates the film) I found myself liking its simple themes, simple message, and simple drawings. "Skizz" is an alien translator stranded in Birmingham, England and aided by disgruntled working class men and kids in his attempt to survive in what turns out to be a fairly hostile environment.

This story is suitable for sixth grade and up; most appropriate as a supplementary addition to a language arts library.

78. The Spirit

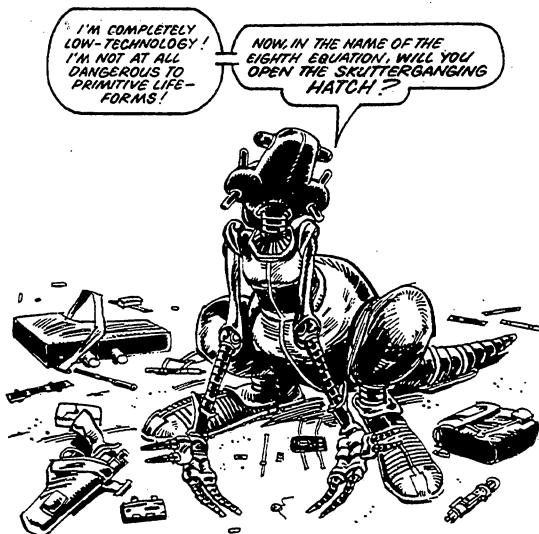
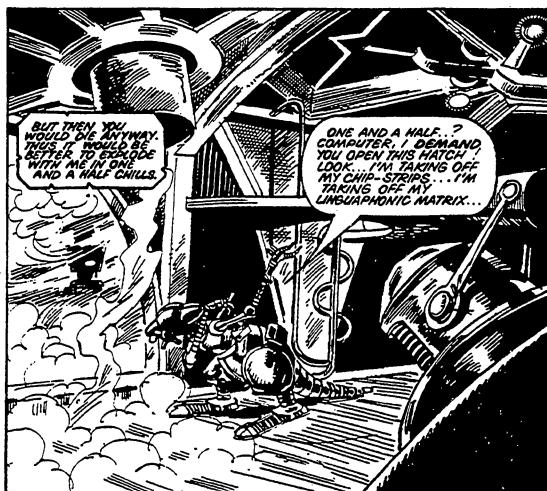
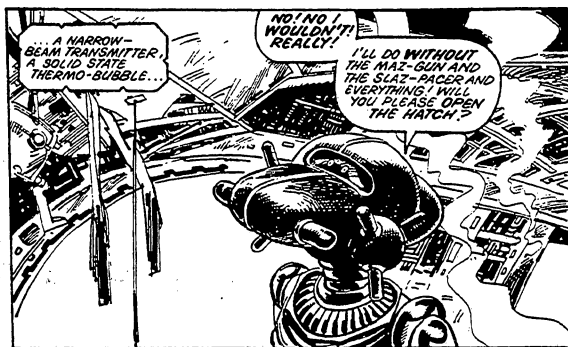
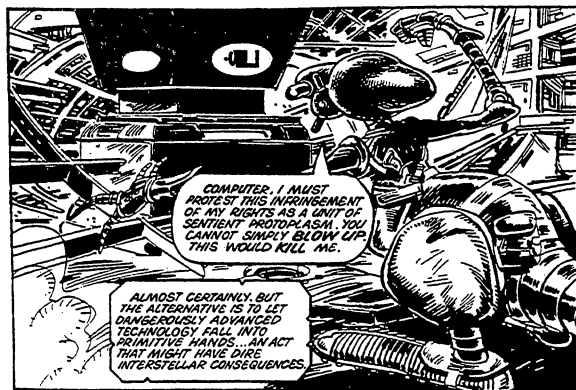
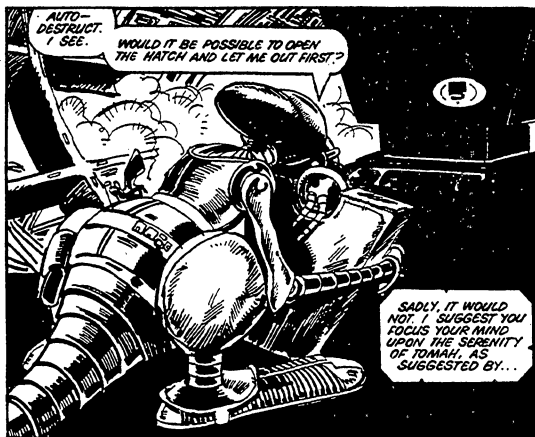


Figure 27. A small disagreement between Skizz and the on-board computer of his spaceship. © 1989 Titan Books Ltd.

Will Eisner

Kitchen Sink

This is one of the more recognizable comix characters, created by Eisner before World War Two as an adventure/crime strip protagonist in the tradition of the times. The complete and utter charm that infuses this series of short mystery stories, however, is what sets it apart from all of the other hundreds of strip characters from the '30's and '40's. As much influenced by the pulp fiction of the time as the comix, The Spirit is actually a mysterious crime fighter in a blue suit and red tie, wears a domino mask, and loves to love as much as he loves to fight crime.

This collection of selected short stories is suitable for all ages, but would be more enjoyed by an older audience, seventh grade and up; contains some violence and mature themes; most appropriate as a study of comix narrative for the incredible page layouts and visual narrative dynamics.

79. Starchild: Awakenings

Starchild: Crossroads

Starchild: Mythopolis

James A. Owen

Taliesin Press

This completely involving fantasy incorporates detailed, lovingly rendered black-and-white art with a cast of characters straight out of a folk tale (and some of them straight out of American pop culture and film). It's as much a study of storytelling as it is a story itself.

Starchild is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mature themes; appropriate for language arts.

80. Swamp Thing: Saga of the Swamp Thing

Swamp Thing: Love and Death

Alan Moore, Steve Bissette and John Totleben

DC Comics

These beautifully haunting and well-written stories about an elemental creature of the earth discovering who and what it is still impress years later after reading them for the first time. They tell the story of Alec Holland, a research scientist working in the Louisiana bayous on methods for accelerating plant and crop growth. When his wife is shot and his lab blown up by saboteurs, Holland's burning body is hurled into the mire of the surrounding swamps effected by the experimental chemicals he'd been working with. The plant life and indigenous flora of the swamplands decompose his body and are infected with his consciousness and intellect. Over the course of these two books, Moore charts the progress of this Swamp Thing, who learns that he is nothing more than the echo of a man, that he is more of the earth than of the flesh, and decides to fight for the earth as much as his "fellow" man.

These stories are suitable for seventh grade and up; some mild language and violence; most appropriate for language arts classes and possibly science courses.

Note: This character was brought to cable television and film a number of times in the past decade, all without any

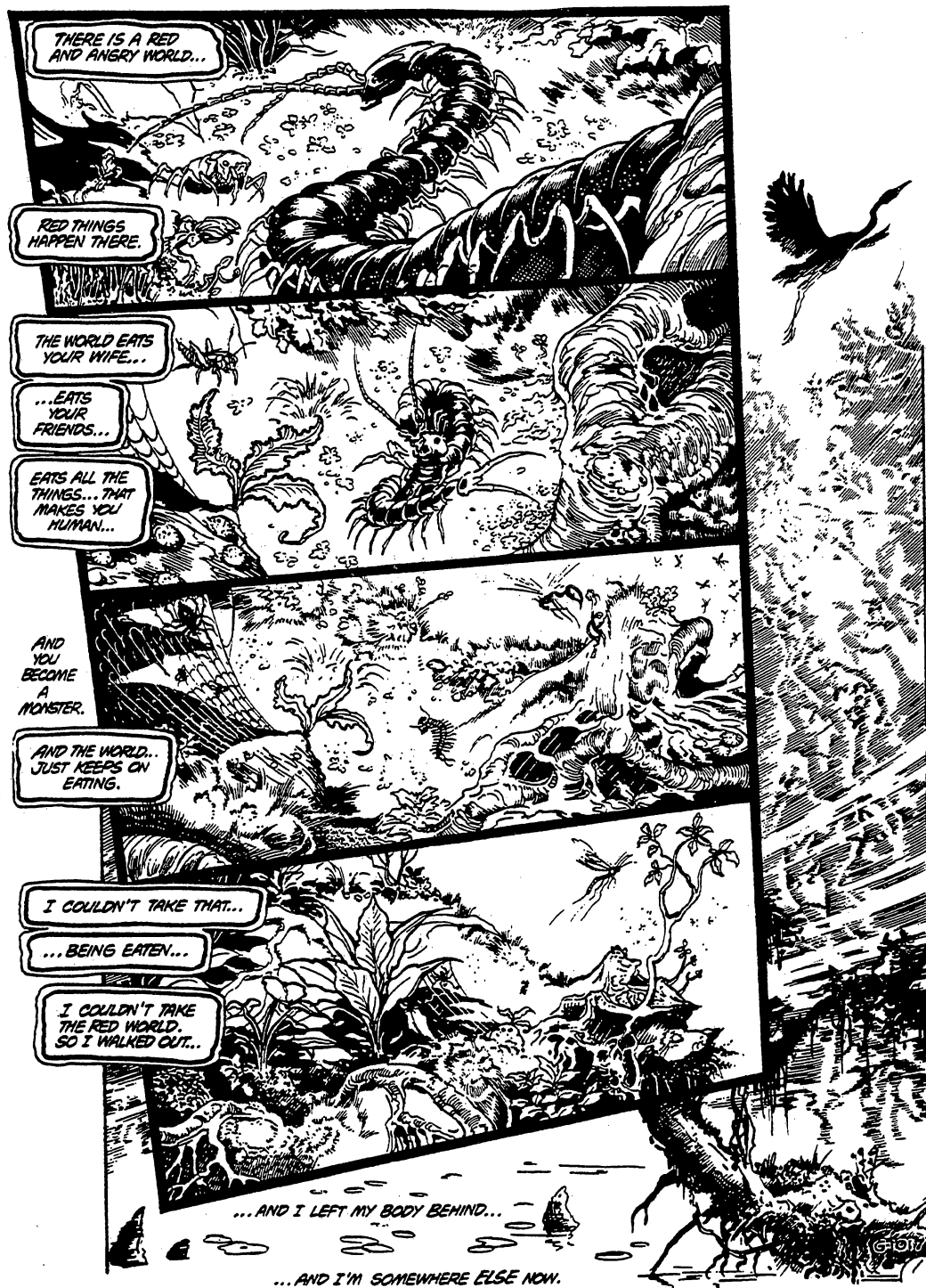


Figure 28. The Swamp Thing feels depressed and roots himself into the Louisiana swamps. © 1984 DC Comics

success. The thematic power of the stories do not translate well to the screen and the results have generally been campy at best.

81. The System

Peter Kuper

DC Comics

Like Kuper's New York, New York [see entry 66], this book is an incredible indictment against the big cities of America, especially New York. This longer story, unlike those contained in the aforementioned collection, is completely wordless, and communicates with beautiful brutality the nature of life in the urban blight that makes up such a large portion of our cityscapes. Scummy, dark, and silent, the hidden layers of this narrative awaken disgust and a slimy, slippery resentment for mankind's darker side that makes this book on par with Upton Sinclair's The Jungle in terms of its effect on the receptive psyche.

This book, like Drooker's The Flood [see entry 34], is an unflinching and symbol-laden look at reality; contains some nudity and mature themes; most suitable for eighth grade and up; appropriate for language arts.

82. The Tale of One Bad Rat

Bryan Talbot

Dark Horse

This daring graphic novel follows the travels and travails of Helen Potter, a homeless girl who's flight from

an abusive father and an uncaring mother is framed by Helen's cushion of internal fantasy. That fantasy is based in the stories of Beatrix Potter, with whom Helen feels a profound connection, and upon whom Helen has come to rely as a source of guidance and comfort. This story is one of the best examples of adult comix in this list, and is highly recommended.

The Tale of One Bad Rat is suitable for tenth grade and up; some harsh language and mature themes; appropriate for language arts.

83. Through the Habitrails

Jeff Nicholson

Bad Habit

This collection of interconnected short stories is a surreal, dark and distorted reflection of life in the modern work-place. The workers are literally tapped of their creativity and energy by their employers, and strange, eerie habitrails run maze-like throughout the various cubicles and offices, carrying frightening hamster creatures who serve as the avatars of this bizarre post-modern landscape. Reminiscent of the best that prose authors like Edgar Allen Poe and Franz Kafka had to offer the people of their time, Nicholson's use of the comix medium to relate his views of the machinery of bureaucracy and the life-draining mediocrity of employment is exemplary, and his stories serve as outstanding cautionary tales for our times.

These stories vary in content and suitability for young

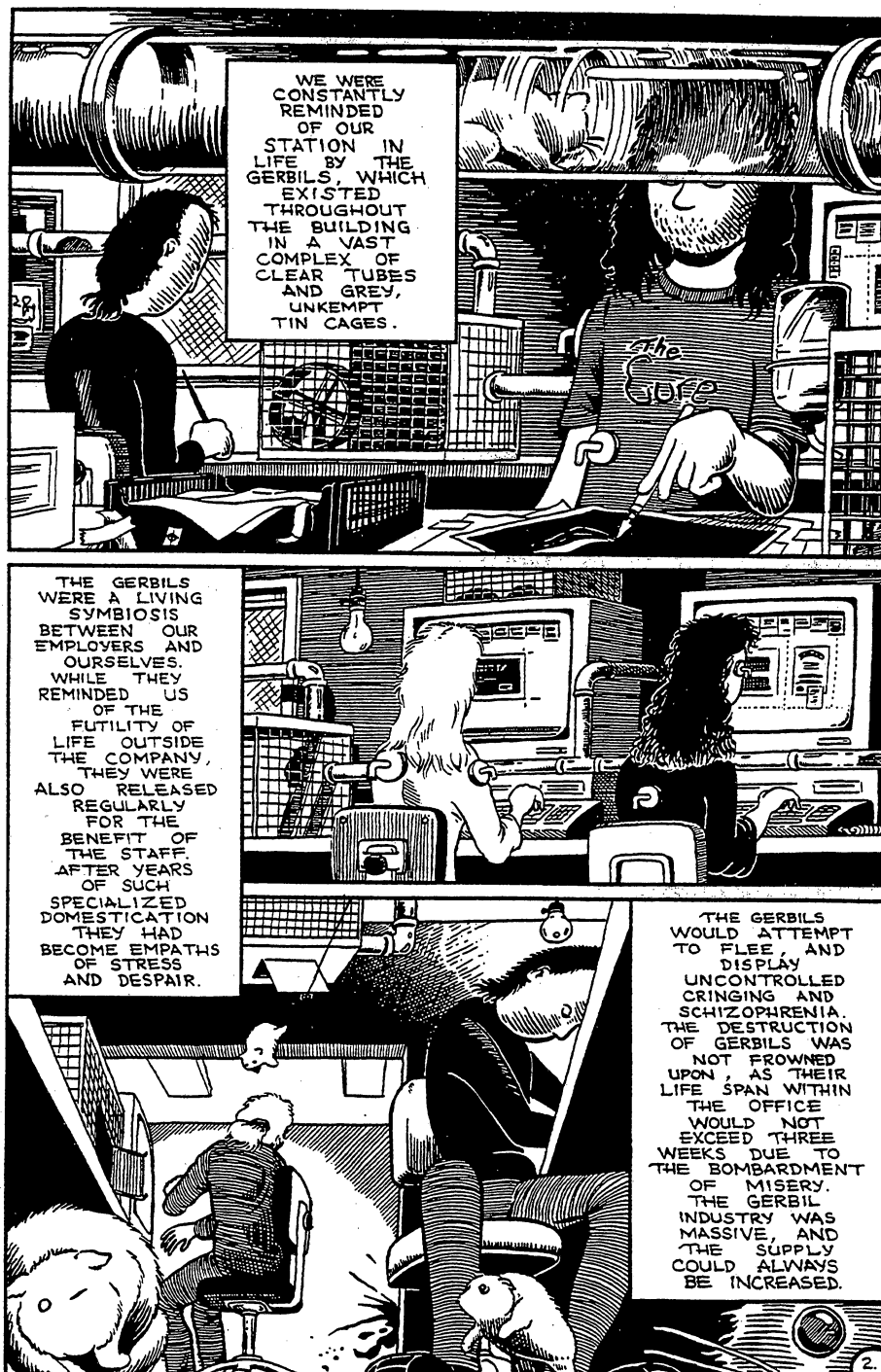


Figure 29. The eerie and surreal workplace of Through the Habitrails is visited. © 1994 Jeff Nicholson

readers; most are suitable for eighth grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts, especially those classes engaged in an in-depth study of the comix medium.

84. Toadswart d'Amplestone, A Gothic Tale of Horror and
Magick

Tim A. Conrad

Eclipse

This "gothic tale" is the story of a hunchback living in a world of shadows and substance. Lovingly rendered in muted grays and charcoal blacks, it relates a sad story of magic and reality, metamorphosis and rejection, despair and hope and love and all that lies between.

This dark fantasy is suitable for ninth grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; appropriate as a supplementary addition to a language arts library.

85. To the Heart of the Storm

Will Eisner

Kitchen Sink Press

This most autobiographical of Eisner's works follows two young men on their way to their military assignment during World War Two. One man, a young, good-natured second-generation Turkish-American, listens as his traveling companion looks out the train window and reminisces aloud about his life growing up in a New York suburb as the son of Jewish immigrants. This story, like Eisner's Dropsie Avenue



Figure 30. Young Will Eisner experiences fledgling prejudice in To the Heart of the Storm. © 1991 Will Eisner

[see entry 29] and A Life Force [see entry 49] relates with vivid clarity and honesty what it was like to live in America during the depression years. More importantly, though, this tale, like all of Eisner's books, conveys to the reader through subtle characterization and powerful drama the many realities of what it is to be human. Any teacher interested in truly literate comix stories would be completely remiss in not including a sampling of Eisner's stories in their classroom.

This book is appropriate for seventh grade and up; most suitable for language arts classes and social studies/history courses.

Note: This master comix artist is also responsible for the graphic novels The Dreamer and New York, The Big City, and The Will Eisner Reader, a collection of short stories. Although these books are not included in this list of one-hundred graphic novels for young adults (mostly for space purposes, but also for some mature content) they are highly recommended.

86. The Trouble with Girls

The Trouble with Girls: My Name is Girls

The Trouble with Girls: Jungle Girls

Will Jacobs, Gerard Jones, and Tim Hamilton

Malibu Graphics

This delightfully silly and tongue-in-cheek satire on the action genre is a breath of fresh air in a medium that sometimes still seems dominated by testosterone saturated,

over-inflated tough guys. Lester Girls is an all-American James Bond whose life is filled to the brim with world-domination obsessed villains, international spies, and beautiful, exotic women--but his real dream is a quiet suburban house and mortgage, a good wife, some freckled kids of his own, and an occasional home-made apple pie. This is a really fun book, and an excellent comix offering for 13 or 14 year old boys who are overly enamoured of the action genre.

This series of books is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mature themes; most suitable as a supplementary addition to a language arts library.

87. Two-Fisted Science

Jim Ottaviani and various
General Textronic Labs

This fun and informative anthology of semi-biographical stories centers around various figures in scientific history. The tone and tenor of this collection is light-hearted yet heartfelt, and the more obscure characters who Ottaviani focuses upon, combined with the quirky philosophical approach of his narratives, is thoroughly enjoyable.

Most of these stories are suitable for seventh grade and up; some mature themes; appropriate for science courses and language arts classes.

88. Understanding Comics

Scott McCloud
Kitchen Sink Press

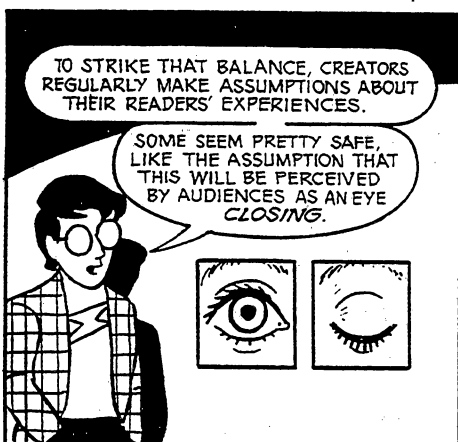
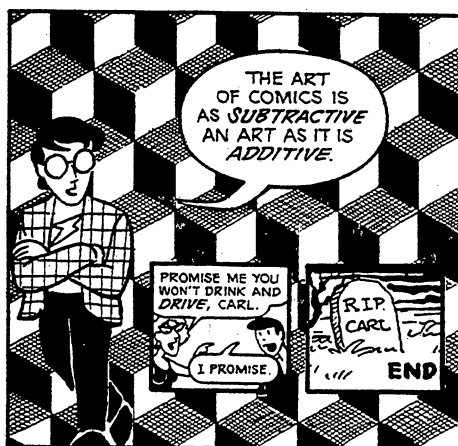
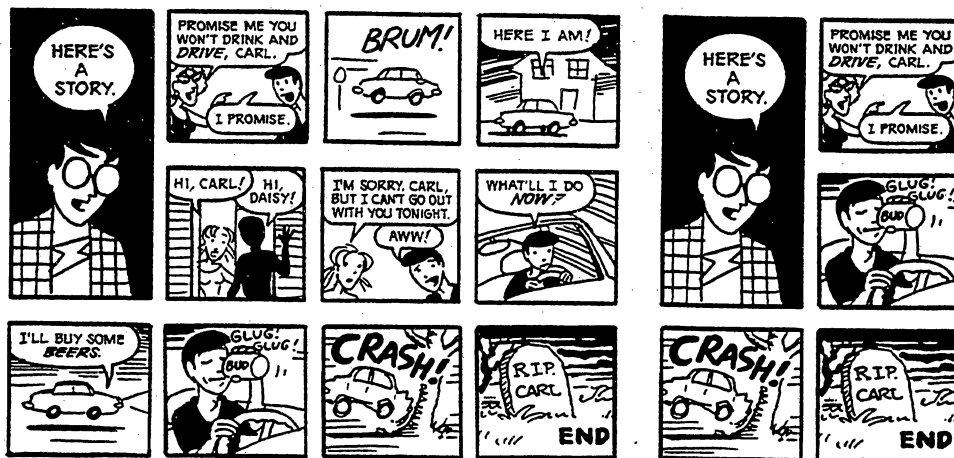


Figure 31. An excellent example of Understanding Comics' special brand of comix narrative study. © 1993 Scott McCloud

This non-fiction book about comix in comix form is an absolutely essential work to be studied in any classes preparing to undergo an investigation of the comix medium and a reading of comix literature. Hailed as one of the most important works about the narrative structure of comic books and sequential art, Scott McCloud sets out, in an exciting, easy-to-read style, to dissect and analyze the surprisingly complex form that cartoonists, strip artists, graphic novel authors, and "funny book" creators have been utilizing for almost a century. Without talking down to his audience, and yet never reaching so high above their heads with useless jargon and pseudo-academic intellectualism that his meaning is lost, McCloud takes his readers step by step through his own conceptualization of what makes comix so unique and different from other storytelling mediums. He begins with a simple historical outline, and then launches into a full-blown, no-holds-barred literary discussion of such topics as: the vocabulary of comix; the use of panels and gutters and the "unseen" aspect of sequential visual storytelling; the craft of the medium and the tools available to the artist in creating a comix story; and even the technological aspects of today's comix. This book is a necessary and wonderfully useful tool in helping students of the medium understand its finer attributes and applications, and any teacher seeking to incorporate comix into the classroom would do well to have their students study and review this book's contents.

This book is suitable for all ages, fifth grade and up; most appropriate for students engaged in a study of literary

comix in language arts.

89. The Upturned Stone

Scott Hampton

Kitchen Sink Press

This marvelous coming-of-age tale begins with a gigantic pumpkin found at an unmarked grave site and ends in fire and death. However, this story is not the mere horror genre piece it may appear to be on the surface, but, rather, a mature study of four boys growing up in a small town in America. This book isn't as narratively complex as Chester Brown's I Never Liked You [see entry 42], but is still a worthy addition to any comix library.

The Upturned Stone is suitable for tenth grade and up; some harsh language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts.

90. Usagi Yojimbo: The Ronin

Usagi Yojimbo: Samurai

Usagi Yojimbo: The Wanderer's Road

Usagi Yojimbo: The Dragon Bellow Conspiracy

Usagi Yojimbo: Lone Goat and Kid

Usagi Yojimbo: Circles

Usagi Yojimbo: Gen's Story

Usagi Yojimbo: Shades of Death

Usagi Yojimbo: Daisho

Stan Sakai

Fantagraphics

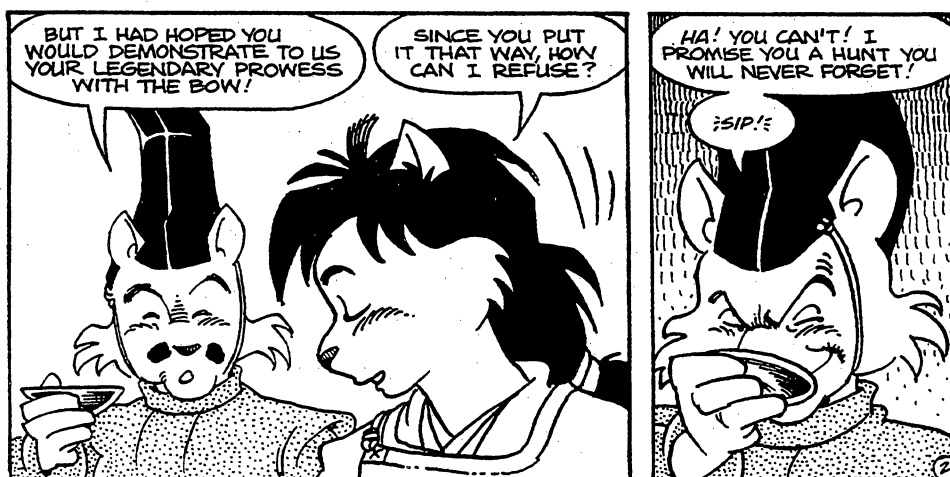
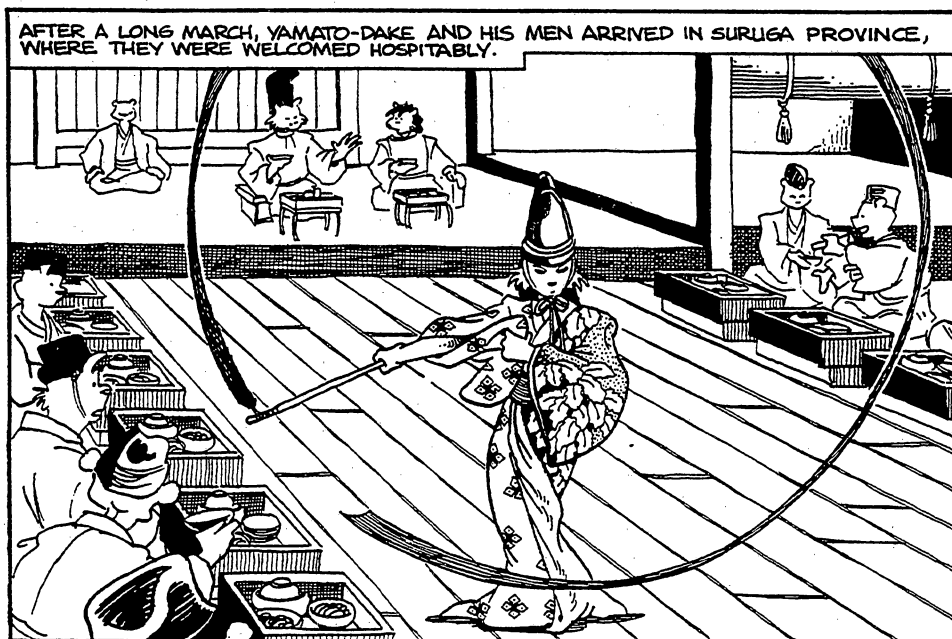


Figure 32. A formal ceremony in Usagi Yojimbo's wonderful depiction of ancient Japan. © 1997 Stan Sakai

These outstanding graphic novels tell the story of "Usagi Yojimbo," (Japanese for "Yojimbo the Rabbit"). Usagi is an anthropomorphized samurai, and each book in this series is an adventure in a land very much like feudal Japan, but subtly different as well (all of the characters are animals in human form, for one thing). Any teacher interested in authentic Asian historical fiction should invest in this series. It is one of the best and most accessible that can be found.

These books are suitable for fifth grade and up; excellent additions to any language arts or social studies library and very teachable.

91. V for Vendetta

Alan Moore and David Lloyd

DC Comics

It's the 1990's and England is ruled by a fascist government. Fact or fiction? Moore and Lloyd craft a tale about post-nuclear war Britain, and the struggle of one man, V, to free its people from bondage. The bondage that concerns V, however, is not the bonds of government, but the bonds that we create of our own accord within our minds out of fear and ignorance. Moore pulls out all of the stops in creating a literate story of oppression, individual freedom, and personal redemption. Originally in black-and-white, V for Vendetta has been recently colorized with subtle hues and gray tones that heighten the mood and tone of this dark, but ultimately optimistic tale.

V for Vendetta is suitable for ninth grade and up; some violence and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts.

92. Viking Glory: The Viking Prince

Lee Mars and Bo Hampton

DC

Like Enemy Ace; War Idyll [see entry 31] this modern graphic novel takes an old character from a mainstream comics company and updates and elaborates on both the concept and the setting of its precursor. Viking Glory: The Viking Prince is the story of Jon, a Viking prince, living in 10th century Scandinavia. Like Beowulf and other great stories of its ilk, this book is filled to bursting with romance, intrigue, villainy, sword fights, and, of course, a dragon.

This book is suitable for fifth grade and up; mild violence; appropriate as a supplementary addition to a language arts library.

93. Violent Cases

Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean

Kitchen Sink Press

This book is raw and unpolished and somewhat lacking in mechanical precision, and all the better for it. The story is about youth and childhood conceptions of the world, about family and dead relatives, about storytelling and the unreliability of history, about a young boy and his first impressions of America. This is the first attempt at

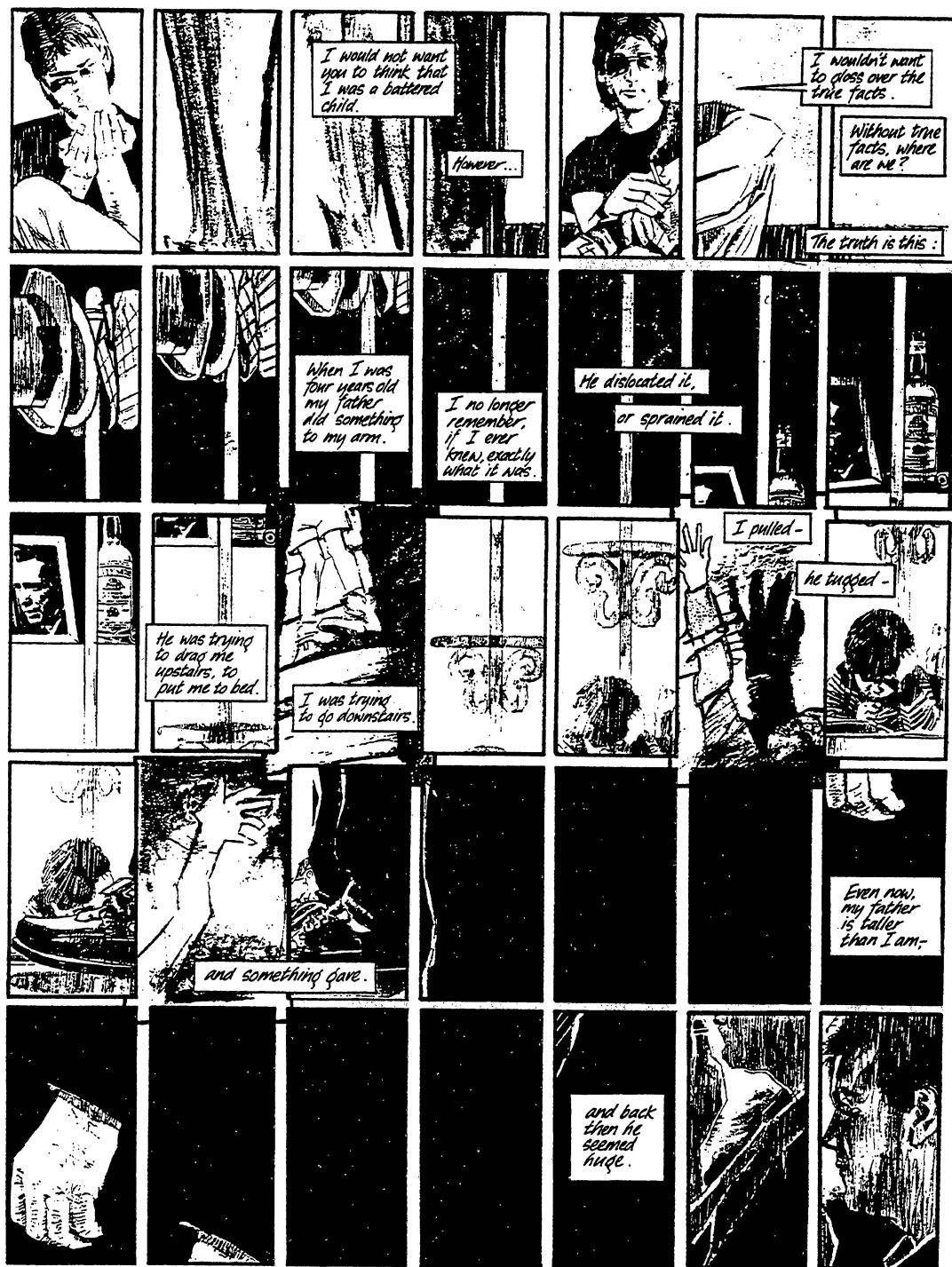


Figure 33. The opening page of an honest contemplation of family in Violent Cases. © 1987 Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean

collaboration between Gaiman and McKean [see entries 63 and 74] and, although a bit more rough around the edges than the other two books they produced together, it is nonetheless a thoroughly realized and provocative tale of what it's like to be a child.

Violent Cases is suitable for ninth grade and up; some mild language and violent themes; most appropriate for language arts.

94. Visitations

C.S. Morse

Image

This phenomenally drawn graphic novella begins as a quiet conversation between an off-duty priest and a young woman who wanders into his church in search of a quiet place to be alone. The woman decries the pointless nature of the world and the things that happen in it. The priest suggests that there is actually underlying meaning to all things, and offers to read at random three newspaper articles from the day's paper and demonstrate how they are proof to this effect. The proceeding stories that he reads, as well as the woman's story, are touching tales that leave even the most cynical reader with a tinge of optimism and hope.

Visitations is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mild language; most appropriate for language arts.

95. Wandering Star: Book I

Wandering Star: Book II



Figure 34. A young woman doesn't believe in God in Visitations. © 1998 C. Scott Morse

Wandering Star: Book III

Teri Sue

Sirius

This science fiction story centers around Casandra Andrews, the daughter of a ranking earth diplomat, who is kidnapped and becomes embroiled in an interplanetary war. Although somewhat immature at the beginning of the story, she finds reason to quickly grow up, eventually becoming part of the crew of the Wandering Star, an intergalactic space ship. This story borders on space opera, but is nevertheless engaging and enjoyable to read. It's also refreshing to see so many female and male cartoonists present strong female protagonists such as Casandra, Chance Falconer [see entry 48], and Karen Brinson [see entry 28].

This story is suitable for seventh grade and up; some mild language and violence; most appropriate for language arts as supplementary material.

96. Watchmen

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons

DC Comics

One of the first graphic novels in this country, along with Maus [see entry 59] to be touted as "comic books for grown ups," on first glance Watchmen simply seems to be about those long-underwear types who bound across rooftops looking for liquor store robberies and fighting likewise-clad super-villains. But it's really not. It's a wonderfully human story of love, destiny, and human imperfection, and serves as a

deconstruction of the entire superhero genre.

This graphic novel is suitable for eighth grade and up; some mild language and mature themes; most appropriate for language arts classes, especially those involved in an in-depth study of the comix medium.

97. Why Did Pete Duel Kill Himself

Mark Kalesniko

Fantagraphics

Pete Duel was an actor who worked in Hollywood from the early 60's to the early '70's whose body was discovered with an apparently self-inflicted mortal gun shot wound. This short graphic novel opens with a newspaper article describing his suicide, and then jumps to short vignettes of a young boy named Alex's youthful troubles and isolation. These stories, strung together like dirty pearls on a necklace, describe the heartache and hurt that Alex experiences, mostly at the hands of his classmates and neighborhood peers. With deceptively innocuous titles like "Peanut Hunt" and "Snowflakes" and "Laughter," these stories have the accumulative effect of being struck with a small hammer on top of the head a dozen times. Short interludes at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the book show Alex as an older teen dealing with the aforementioned article and its impact on him, having grown up with the t.v. shows and movies of this obscure actor, who apparently "had it all" and still chose to take himself out of the world. All of these seemingly disparate elements come together to forge a resoundingly sad tale of childhood

innocence slowly lost or, more accurately, taken away by the world.

This book is powerful and depressing, but an excellent examination of young adulthood; some mild language; most suitable for eighth grade and up; appropriate for language arts.

98. Wilderness: The True Story of Simon Girty, Renegade

Timothy Truman

4Winds

I see so little good, serious work in the genre of historical fiction in comic books, but Truman has outdone all his previous efforts in the medium with this graphic novel about Simon Girty, a figure from the "wild west" who straddled two worlds, white and red, and somehow managed to retain his integrity, even if history has tried to undo it. Girty is captured and raised by Seneca tribesman during the French and Indian War and later released at Fort Pitt, where he became a trusted interpreter, longhunter, and scout for the Americans. He walked the line between the Native American people and the Americans and, during the American Revolution, sided with the English and their Native American allies against the United States. This is a complex piece of historical fiction examining a complex figure in American history.

Wilderness is most suitable for ninth grade and up; appropriate for language arts and social studies.



Figure 35. Young Simon Girty is exposed to anger and nationalized prejudice in Wilderness. © 1989 Timothy Truman

99. The Wizard's Tale

Kurt Busiek and David Wenzel

Homage

Bafflerog is an evil wizard who's not terribly good at being evil. He lives in the farthest corner of the Land of Ever-Night, and spends the majority of his time trying to do rotten things to innocent people, as evil wizards should. The only problem is that his heart's not in it. Years and years ago, the forces of evil won the penultimate war against good, and the people of this magical realm have been paying ever since. But one powerful white mage, now cursed to live out his life as a hideous toad, has hopes that Bafflerog may be a key player in the scheme to find "The Book of Worse," an ancient tome that could turn the tides in favor of good and eliminate darkness forever. This is a wonderful story that turns the conventions of the fantasy genre on their ear in a charming, inventive way.

This book is suitable for all ages, especially fifth through seventh grade; most appropriate for language arts.

100. Zot: Book One

Zot: Book Two

Scott McCloud

Kitchen Sink Press

Welcome to "the far-flung future of 1965." These two books explore the fantastic alternate earth of Zachary T. PaleZogt, Zot to his friends. Jenny Weaver becomes one of those friends when Zot chases a killer robot through a



Figure 36. Zot tries to comfort a friend, somewhat less than successfully. © 1998 Scott McCloud

dimensional doorway into Jenny's front yard. Jenny and her brother Butch become part of Zot's mission to find a stolen key that is said to open a "doorway at the edge of the universe." No one knows what the doorway is or what it may open up to, but many religions have sprung up in speculation. Leave it be said that the key has been stolen and Zot's mission (while having fun along the way) is to find it and return it to its rightful owners. This is McCloud's first extended comix novel, and is in many ways more accessible than his other unique novel, The New Adventures of Abraham Lincoln [see entry 65].

These two volumes are suitable for all ages, especially fifth through seventh grade; most appropriate for language arts.

CALENDAR

The following is a brief timeline that any teacher can follow pertaining to the implementation of a comix program specifically within the language arts curriculum, but similar steps can be taken for any classroom study of comix. These first three months of goals would best be accomplished during the summer months, and actual implementation of program in the classrooms will vary depending upon the teacher involved.

- 1st Month: Form a site-based committee composed of interested teachers with the specific job of reading and reviewing graphic novels and comix for young adults. Hold a seminar introducing a sampling of graphic novels and comix suitable for individual site, perhaps utilizing the 100 Graphic Novels for Young Adults as a "starter pack" of information.
- 2nd Month: Contact various catalogs, comix shops, distribution channels, and publishing houses [see Recommendations in Chapter Four], with the express purpose of purchasing a number of "reviewers' copies" of graphic novels that have been chosen as suitable. Read and review a wide range of material, choose those most appropriate, then submit and obtain board approval.
- 3rd Month: Construct and create lessons plans for comix works, either as part of thematic units or as comix unit.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Comix is a fledgling medium of communication and art when compared to the novel or stage play. That does not mean, however, that there are not great, literate works available for use in instruction by teachers and the edification of students. There is a preconception in this country that comix, as a medium, are not capable of the same level of power and depth that other artistic or storytelling artforms are, and this is blatantly false. If teachers will simply seek out some of the works that catch their eye in the list for 100 graphic novels in Chapter Three, they will see that there is an abundance of great works available to them, both for their personal pleasure and for use in their classrooms.

Comix and graphic novels are worthy of inclusion in our classrooms. They are a resource of literature and art virtually ignored and untapped in our public schools. They are capable of being used for the attainment of the same framework goals that are attained through a reading of prose, poetry, drama, screenplays, etc., and should be used to help facilitate learning.

Comix and graphic novels can be powerful tools for learning, not only in language arts curriculums, but other areas of study as well. They simply need to be given a chance in the classroom by daring teachers willing and desirous to try something practically untried.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluation of this program will be done throughout its implementation. The evaluation should be performed by the teachers utilizing comix in their class and the committee involved in the approval of appropriate comix texts and graphic novels, and should consist of the following criteria:

- How well do the comix texts and graphic novels meet the needs of the given framework requirements?
- How well are the comix texts and graphic novels received by the students using them?
- How well do the comix texts and graphic novels mesh with other thematic units taught?
- How well are the comix texts and graphic novels taught separately, as part of a comix unit (especially within language arts classes)?
- How well do parents and administration seem to receive comix in the classroom?
- What new connections between curricula, what unique teaching opportunities, and what unprecedented results are found to come from the teaching of comix in the classroom?

RECOMMENDATIONS

The single most significant recommendation that could be given to interested scholars and teachers after reading this book and reviewing this program is this: READ. It is simple to obtain most of the works in the 100 Graphic Novels for Young Adults list contained in Chapter Three. Do not search for them in bookstores. Many of them can not easily be found in mainstream book chains. Rather, write, phone, fax, or e-mail to Diamond Comic Distributors, Inc. any inquiries you may have. Diamond is the largest distributor of comix and graphic novels in the country, and will be able to meet most of your needs.

ADDRESS:

Diamond Comics Distributors, Inc.
1966 Greenspring Drive, Suite 300
Timonium, MD
21093

PHONE:

(800) 452-6642 or (410) 560-7100

FAX:

(800) 329-2878 or (410) 560-7148

E-MAIL:

service@diamondcomics.com

WEB:

www.diamondcomics.com

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